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*PAUL'S PRAYERS*  
*AND OTHER SERMONS*

*ALEXANDER MacLAREN, D.D.*

Albert H. Smith

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# PAUL'S PRAYERS

*AND OTHER SERMONS*

BY

ALEXANDER MACLAREN D.D.

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## PREFACE.

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By an unfortunate mistake, the first edition of this book contained several sermons which had been included in a former volume of the author's. These have now been replaced by others which have not previously appeared in book form.



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## I.

### Worthy of your Calling.

“WE pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in Him.”—2 THESS. i. 11, 12.



IN the former letter to the Church of Thessalonica, the Apostle had dwelt, in ever-memorable words — which sound like a prelude of the trump of God—on the coming of Christ at the end to judge the world and to gather His servants into His rest. That great thought seems to have excited some of the hotter heads in Thessalonica, and to have led to a general feverishness of unwholesome expectancy of the near approach or actual dawn of the day. This letter is intended as a supplement to the former epistle, and to damp down the fire which had been kindled. It, therefore, dwells with emphasis on the necessary preliminaries to the dawning of that day of the Lord, and throughout seeks to lead the excited spirits to patience and persistent work, and to calm their feverish expectations. This purpose colours the whole letter.

Another striking characteristic of it is the frequent gushes of short prayer for the Thessalonians with which the writer turns aside from the main current of his thoughts. In its brief compass there are four of these prayers, which, taken together, present many aspects of the Christian life, and hold out much for our hopes and much for our efforts. The prayer which I have read for our text this morning is the first of these. The others, the consideration of which will follow on subsequent occasions, are these:—“Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and stablish you in every good word and work.”

And, again, “The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.”

And, finally, summing up all, “The Lord of peace Himself give you peace always, by all means.” So full, so tender, so directed to the highest blessings and to those only, are the wishes of a true Christian teacher, and of a true Christian friend, for those to whom He ministers and whom He loves. It is a poor love that cannot express itself in prayer. It is an earthly love which desires for its objects anything less than the highest of blessings.

I.—Notice, first, here, the Divine test for Christian lives: “We pray for you, that God would count you worthy of your calling.”

Now, it is to be observed that this “counting worthy” refers mainly to a future estimate to be made by God of the completed career and permanent character brought out of earth into another state by

Christian souls. That is obvious from the whole strain of the letter, which I have already pointed out as mainly being concerned with the future coming to judgment of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is also, I think, made probable by the fact that the same expression, "counting worthy," occurs in an earlier verse of this chapter, where the reference is exclusively to the future judgment.

So, then, we are brought face to face with this thought of an actual, stringent judgment which God will apply in the future to the lives and characters of professing Christians. Now, that is a great deal too much forgotten in our popular Christian teaching and in our average Christian faith. It is perfectly true that he that trusts in Jesus Christ "will not come into condemnation, but has passed from death unto life." But it is just as true that "judgment shall begin at the house of God," and that "the Lord will judge His people." And, therefore, it becomes us to lay to heart this truth, that we, just because, if we are Christians, we stand nearest to God, are surest to be searched through and through by the light that streams from Him, and to have every flaw and corrupt speck and black spot brought out into startling prominence. Let no Christian man fancy that he shall escape the righteous judgment of God. The great doctrine of forgiveness does not mean that He suffers our sin to remain upon us unjudged, ay! or unavenged. But just as, day by day, there is an actual estimate in the Divine mind, according to truth, of what we really are, so, at the last, God's servants shall be gathered before His throne. "They that have made a covenant with Him by

sacrifice" shall be assembled there—as the Psalm has it—"that the Lord may judge His people."

Then, if the actual passing of a Divine judgment day by day, and a future solemn act of judgment after we have done with earth, and our characters are completed, and our careers rounded into a whole, is to be looked for by Christians, what is the standard by which their worthiness is to be judged?

"Your calling." The "this" of my text in the Authorised Version is a supplement, and a better supplement is that of the Revised Version, "your calling." Now *calling* does not mean "avocation" or "employment," as I perhaps need scarcely explain, but the Divine fact of our having been summoned by Him to be His. Consider who calls. God Himself. Consider how He calls. By the Gospel, by Jesus Christ, or, as another apostle has it, "by His own glory and virtue" manifested in the world. That great voice which is in Jesus Christ, so tender, so searching, so heart-melting, so vibrating with the invitation of love and the yearning of a longing heart, summons or calls us. Consider, also, what this calling is to. "God hath not called us to uncleanness, but to holiness," or, as this letter has it, in another part, "unto salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." By all the subduing and animating and restraining and impelling tones in the sacrifice and life of Jesus Christ we are summoned to a life of self-crucifixion, of subjection of the flesh, of aspiration after God, of holy living according to the pattern that was showed us in Him. We are summoned here and now to a life of purity and righteousness and self-sacrifice. But also "He hath called us

to His everlasting kingdom and glory." That voice sounds from above now. From the Cross it said to us, "I die that ye may live"; from the Throne it says to us, "Live because I live, and come to live where I live." The same invitation, which calls us to a life of righteousness and self-suppression and purity, also calls us, with the sweet promise that is firm as the Throne of God, to the everlasting felicities of that perfect kingdom in which, because the obedience is entire, the glory shall be untremulous and unstained. Therefore, considering Who summons, by what He summons, and to what He calls us, do there not lie in the fact of that Divine call to which we Christians say that we have yielded, the solemnest motives, the loftiest standard, the most stringent obligations for life? What sort of a life will that be which is worthy of that voice? Is yours? Is mine? Are there not the most flagrant examples of professing Christians, whose lives are in the most outrageous discordance with the lofty obligations and mighty motives of the summons which they profess to have obeyed? "Worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called!" Have I made my own the things which I am invited to possess? Have I yielded to the obligations which are enwrapped in that invitation? Does my life correspond to the Divine purpose in calling me to be His? Can I say, "Lord, Thou art mine, and I am Thine, and here my life witnesses to it, because self is banished from it, and I am full of God, and the life which I live in the flesh I live not to myself, but to Him that died for me"?

An absolute correspondence, a complete worthiness or perfect desert, is impossible for us all, but a worthi-

ness which His merciful judgment who makes allowance for us all may accept, as not too flagrantly contradictory of what He meant us to be, is possible even for our poor attainments and our stained lives. If it were Paul's supreme prayer, should it not be our supreme aim, that we may be worthy of Him that hath called us, and "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called"?

II.—Note, here, the Divine help to meet the test.

If it were a matter of our own effort alone, who of us could pretend to reach to the height of conformity with the great design of the loving Father in summoning us, or with the mighty powers that are set in motion by the summons for the purifying of men's lives? But here is the great characteristic and blessing of God's Gospel, that it not only summons us to holiness and to heaven, but reaches out a hand to help us thither. Therein it contrasts with all other voices—and many of them are noble and pathetic in their insistence and vehemence—which call men to lofty lives. Whether it be the voice of conscience, or of human ethics, or of the great ones, the elect of the race, who, in every age, have been as voices crying in the wilderness, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord"—all these call us, but reach no hand out to draw us. They are all as voices from the heights and are of God, but they are voices only. They summon us to noble deeds, and leave us floundering in the mire.

But we have not a God who tells us to be good, and then watches to see if we will obey, but we have a God who, with all His summonses, brings to us the help to keep His commandments. Our God has more than a voice to enjoin, He has a hand to lift. "Give what



Thou commandest, and command what Thou wilt," said Augustine. There is the blessing and glory of the Gospel, that its summons has in it an impelling power which makes men able to be what it enjoins them to become. My text, therefore, follows the prayer "that God would count you worthy," which contemplates God simply as judging men's correspondence with the ideal revealed in their calling, with the look of faith to the giving God, who works in us, if we will let Him, that which He enjoins on us. There are two directions of that Divine working specified in the text. Paul asks that God would fulfil "every desire of goodness and every work of faith," as the Revised Version renders the words. Two things, then, we may hope that God will do for us—He will fulfil every yearning after righteousness and purity in our hearts, and will perfect the active energy which faith puts forth in our lives.

Paul says, in effect, first, that God will fulfil every desire that longs for goodness. He is scarcely deserving of being called good who does not desire to be better. Aspiration must always be ahead of performance in a growing life, such as every Christian life ought to be. To long for any righteousness and beauty of goodness is, in some imperfect and incipient measure, to possess the good for which we long. This is the very signature of a Christian life—yearning after unaccomplished perfection. If you know nothing of that desire that stings and impels you onwards; if you do not know what it is to say, "Oh! wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" if you do not know what it is to follow the fair ideal realized in Jesus Christ with infinite longing,



what right have you to call yourself a Christian? The very essence of the Christian life is yearning for completeness, and restlessness as long as sin has any power over us. We live not only by admiration, faith, and love, but we live by hope; and he who does not hunger and thirst after righteousness has yet to learn what be the first principles of the Gospel of Christ.

If there be not the desire after goodness, the restlessness and dissatisfaction with every present good, the brave ambition that says, "Forgetting the things that are behind I reach forth unto the things that are before," there is nothing in a man to which God's grace can attach itself. God cannot make you better if you do not wish to be better. There is no point upon which His hallowing and ennobling grace can lay hold in your hearts without such desire. "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it." If, as is too often the case with hosts of professing Christians, you shut your mouths tight and lock your teeth, how can God put any food between your lips? There must, first of all, be the aspiration, and then there will be the satisfaction.

I look out upon my congregation, or, better still, I look into my own heart, and I say, If I, if you, dear brethren, are not worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called, we have not because we ask not. If there be no desire after goodness in our hearts, God cannot make us good. Our wishes are the mould into which the molten metal from the great furnace of His love will run. If we bring but a little vessel we cannot get a large supply. The manna lies round our tents; it is for us to determine how much we will gather.

And in like manner, says Paul, God will fulfil every work of faith. Our faith in Jesus Christ will naturally tend to influence our lives, and to manifest itself as a driving power which will set all the wheels of conduct in motion. Paul is quite sure that if we trust ourselves to God, all the beneficent and holy work that flows from such confidence will by Him be fully perfected.

God's fulfilment is to be done *with power*. That is to say, He will fit us to be worthy of our calling, He will answer our desires, He will give energy to our faith, and complete in number and in quality its operations in our lives, by reason of His dwelling with us and in us by that spirit of power and of love, and of a sound mind which works all righteousness in believing hearts, and sheds Divine beauty and goodness over character and life.

III.—Lastly, note the Divine glory of the Worthy.

This fulfilment of every desire of goodness and work of faith is in order "that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you and ye in Him."

Here, again, as in the first clause of our text, I take, in accordance with the prevailing tone of this letter, the reference to be mainly, though perhaps not exclusively, to a future transcendent glorifying of the name of Christ in perfected saints, and glorifying of perfected saints in Jesus Christ.

We have, then, set forth, first, as the result of the fulfilling of Christian men's desires after goodness, and the work of their faith, the glory that accrues to Christ from perfected saints. They are His workmanship. You remember the old story of the artist

who went into a fellow-artist's studio and left upon the easel one complete circle, swept with one master-whirl of the brush. Jesus Christ presents perfected men to an admiring universe as specimens of what He can do. His highest work is the redeeming of poor creatures like you and me, and the making of us perfect in goodness and worthy of our calling. We are His *chefs d'œuvre*, the master work of the great Divine artist.

Think, then, brethren, how, here and now, Christ's reputation is in our hands. Men judge of Him by us. The name of the Lord Jesus is glorified in you if you live "worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called," and people will think better of the Master if His disciples are faithful. Depend upon it, if this church, for instance, and the Christian people within these walls now, lived the lives that they ought to do, and manifested the power of the Gospel as they might, there would be many who would say, "They have been with Jesus, and the Jesus that has made them what they are must be mighty and great." The best evidence of the power of the Gospel is your consistent lives.

Think, too, of that strange dignity that in the future, in manners and in regions all undiscernible by us, Christians, who have been made out of stones into children of God, will make known "unto principalities and powers in heavenly places" the wisdom and the love and the energy of the redeeming God. Who knows to what regions the commission of the perfected saints to make Christ known may carry them? Light travels far, and we cannot tell into what remote corners of the universe this may penetrate.

This only we know, that they who shall be counted worthy to attain that life and the resurrection from the dead shall bear the image of the heavenly, and perhaps to creations yet uncreated, and still to be evolved through the ages of Eternity, it may be their part to carry the lustre of the light of the glory of God who redeemed and purified them.

On the other hand, there is glory accruing to perfected saints in Christ. "And ye in Him." There will be a union so close as that nothing closer is possible, personality being preserved, between Christ and the saints above, who trust Him and love Him and serve Him there. And that union will lead to a participation in His glory which shall exalt their limited, stained, and fragmentary humanity into "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Astronomers tell us that dead, cold matter falls from all corners of the system into the sun, drawn by its magic magnetism from farthest space, and, plunging into that great reservoir of fire, the deadest and coldest matter glows with fervid heat and dazzling light. So you and I, dead, cold, dull, opaque, heavy fragments, drawn into mysterious oneness with Christ, the Sun of our souls, shall be transformed into His own image, and like Him be light and heat which shall radiate through the universe.

Brethren, meditate on your calling, the fact, its method, its aim, its obligations, and its powers. Cherish hopes and desires after goodness, the only hopes and desires that are certain to be fulfilled. Cultivate the life of faith working by love, and let us all live in the light of that solemn expectation that

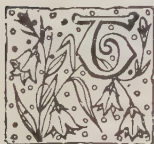
the Lord will judge His people. Then we may hope that the voice which summoned us will welcome us, and proclaim even of us, stained and undeserving as we rightly feel ourselves to be: "They have not defiled their garments, therefore they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy."



## II.

### Everlasting Consolation and Good Hope.

"Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work."—2 THESS. ii. 16, 17.



HIS is the second of the four brief prayers which, as I pointed out in my last sermon, break the current of Paul's teaching in this letter, and witness to the depth of his affection to his Thessalonian converts. We do not know the special circumstances under which these then were, but there are many allusions, both in the first and second epistles, which seem to indicate that they specially needed the gift of consolation.

They were a young Church, just delivered from paganism. Like lambs in the midst of wolves, they stood amongst bitter enemies, their teacher had left them alone, and their raw convictions needed to be consolidated and matured in the face of much opposition. No wonder then that over and over again, in both letters, we have references to the persecutions and tribulations which they endured, and to the consolations which would much more abound.

But whatever may have been their specific circumstances, the prayer which puts special emphasis on comfort is as much needed by each of us as it could ever have been by any of them. For there are no eyes that have not wept, or will not weep; no breath that has not been, or will not be, drawn in sighs; and no hearts that have not bled or will not bleed. So, dear friends, the prayer that went up for these long since comforted brothers, in their forgotten obscure sorrows, is as needful for each of us—that the God who has given everlasting consolation may apply the consolations which He has supplied, and “comfort our hearts and stablish them in every good word and work.”

The prayer naturally falls, as all true prayer will, into three sections—the contemplation of Him to whom it is addressed, the grasping of the great act on which it is based, and the specification of the desires which it includes. These three thoughts may guide us for a few moments now.

I.—First of all, then, note the Divine hearers of the prayer.

The first striking thing about this prayer is its emphatic recognition of the Divinity of Jesus Christ as a truth familiar to these Thessalonian converts. Note the solemn accumulation of His august titles, “Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.” Note, further, that extraordinary association of His name with the Father’s. Note, still further, the most remarkable order in which these two names occur—Jesus first, God second. If we were not so familiar with the words, and with their order, which reappears in Paul’s well-known and frequently-used Benediction, we should be startled to find that Jesus Christ was put



before God in such a solemn address. The association and the order of mention of the names are equally outrageous, profane, and inexplicable, except upon one hypothesis, and that is that Jesus Christ is Divine.

The reason for the order may be found partly in the context, which has just been naming Christ, but still more in the fact that whilst he writes, the Apostle is realizing the mediation of Christ, and that the order of mention is the order of our approach. The Father comes to us in the Son; we come to the Father by the Son; and, therefore, it is no intercepting of our reverence, nor blasphemously lifting the creature to undue elevation, when in one act the Apostle appeals to "our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father."

Note, still further, the distinct address to Christ as the Hearer of Prayer. And, note, last of all, about this matter, the singular grammatical irregularity in my text, which is something much more than a mere blunder or slip of the pen. The words which follow,—viz., "comfort" and "stablish"—are in the singular, whilst these two mighty and august names are their nominatives, and would therefore, by all regularity, require a plural to follow them. That this peculiarity is no mere accident, but intentional and deliberate, is made probable by the two instances in our text, and is made certain, as it seems to me, by the fact that the same anomalous and eloquent construction occurs in the previous epistle to the same Church, where we have in exact parallelism with our text, "God Himself, our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ," with the singular verb, "direct our way unto you." The

phraseology is the expression, in grammatical form, of the great truth, "Whatsoever things the Father doeth, these also doth the Son likewise." And from it there gleam out unmistakably the great principles of the unity of action and the distinction of person between Father and Son, in the depths of that infinite and mysterious Godhead.

Now all this, which seems to me to be irrefragable, is made the more remarkable and the stronger as a witness of the truth, from the fact that it occurs in this perfectly incidental fashion, and without a word of explanation or apology, as taking for granted that there was a background of teaching in the Thessalonian Church which had prepared the way for it, and rendered it intelligible, as well as a background of conviction which had previously accepted it.

And, remember, these two letters, thus full-toned in their declaration, and taking for granted the previous acceptance of the great doctrine of the Divinity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, are the earliest portions of the New Testament, and are often spoken about as being singularly undogmatic. So they are, and therefore all the more eloquent and all the more conclusive is such a testimony as this to the sort of teaching which from the beginning the Apostle addressed to his converts.

Now is that your notion of Jesus Christ? Do you regard Him as the sharer in the Divine attributes and in the Divine throne? It was a living Christ that Paul was thinking about when he wrote these words, who could hear him praying in Corinth, and could reach a helping hand down to these poor men in Thessalonica. It was a Divine Christ that Paul was

thinking about when he dared to say, "Our Lord Jesus Christ, and God our Father." And I beseech you to ask yourself the question whether your faith accepts that great teaching, and whether to you He is far more than "the Man Christ Jesus"; and just because he is *the* man, is therefore the Son of God. Brethren! Either Jesus lies in an unknown grave, ignorant of all that is going on here, and the notion that He can help is a delusion and a dream, or else He is the everliving because He is the Divine Christ, to whom we poor men can speak with the certainty that He hears us, and who wields the energies of Deity, and works the same works as the Father, for the help and blessing of the souls that trust Him.

II.—Secondly, note the great fact on which this prayer builds itself.

The form of words in the original, "loved" and "given," all but necessarily requires us to suppose that their reference is to some one definite historical act in which the love was manifested, and, as love always does, found voice in giving. Love is the infinite desire to bestow, and its language is always a gift. Then, according to the Apostle's thought, there is some one act in which all the fulness of the Divine love manifests itself; some one act in which all the treasures which God can bestow upon men are conveyed and handed over to a world.

The statement that there is such renders almost unnecessary the question what such an act is. For there can be but one in all the sweep of the magnificent and beneficent Divine deeds, so correspondent to His love, and so inclusive of all His giving, as that it shall be the ground of our confidence and the warrant

for our prayers. The gift of Jesus Christ is that in which everlasting consolation and good hope are bestowed upon men. When our desires are widened out to the widest they must be based upon the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ; and when we would think most confidently and most desiringly of the benefits that we seek, for ourselves or for our fellows, we must turn to the Cross. My prayer is then acceptable and prevalent when it foots itself on the past Divine act, and looking to the life and death of Jesus Christ, is widened out to long for, ask for, and in the very longing and asking for to begin to possess, the fulness of the gifts which then were brought to men in Him.

“Everlasting consolation and good hope.” I suppose the Apostle’s emphasis is to be placed quite as much on the adjectives as on the nouns; for there be consolations enough in the world, only none of them are permanent; and there are hopes enough that amuse and draw men, but one of them only is “good.” The gift of Christ, thinks Paul, is the gift of a comfort which will never fail amidst all the vicissitudes and accumulated and repeated and prolonged sorrows to which flesh is heir, and is likewise the gift of a hope which, in its basis and in its objects, is equally noble and good.

Look at these two things briefly. Paul thinks that in Jesus Christ you and I, and all the world, if it will have it, has received the gift of an everlasting comfort. Ah! Sorrow is more persistent than consolation. The bandaged wounds bleed again; the fire damped down for a moment smoulders, even when damped, and bursts out again. But there is one source of comfort

which, because it comes from an unchangeable Christ, and because it communicates unfailing gifts of patience and insight, and because it leads forward to everlasting blessednesses and recompenses, may well be called "eternal consolation." Of course, consolation is not needed when sorrow has ceased; and when the wiping away of all tears from off all faces, and the plunging of grief into the nethermost fires, there to be consumed, have come about, there is no more need for comforts. Yet that which made the comfort while sorrow lasts makes the triumph and the rapture when sorrow is dead, and is everlasting though its office of consolation determines with earth.

"Good hope through grace." This is the weakness of all the hopes which dance like fireflies in the dark before men, and are often like will-o'-the-wisps in the night tempting men into deep mire, where there is no standing—that they are uncertain in their basis and inadequate in their range. The prostitution of the great faculty of hope is one of the saddest characteristics of our feeble and fallen manhood; for the bulk of our hopes are doubtful and akin to fears, and are mean and low, and disproportioned to the possibilities, and therefore the obligations, of our spirits. But in that Cross which teaches us the meaning of sorrows, and in that Christ whose presence is light in darkness, and the very embodied consolation of all hearts, there lie at once the foundation and the object of a hope which, in consideration both of object and foundation, stands unique in its excellence and sufficient in its firmness. "A good hope"; good because well founded; and good because grasping worthy objects; eternal conso-

lation outlasting all sorrows—these things were given once for all, to the whole world when Jesus Christ came and lived and died. The materials for a comfort that shall never fail me, and for the foundation and the object of a hope that shall never be ashamed, are supplied in Jesus Christ our Lord. And so these gifts, already passed under the great seal of heaven, and confirmed to us all, if we choose to take them for ours, are the ground upon which the largest prayers may be rested, and the most ardent desires may be unblamably cherished, in the full confidence that no petitions of ours can reach to the greatness of the Divine purpose, and that the widest and otherwise wildest of our hopes and wishes are sober underestimates of what God has already given to us. For if He has given the material, He will apply what He has supplied. And if He has thus in the past bestowed the possibilities of comfort and hope upon the world, He will not slack His hand, if we desire the possibility to be in our hearts turned into the actuality.

God has given, therefore God will give. That is Heaven's logic, but it does not do for men. It presupposes inexhaustible resources, unchangeable purposes of kindness, patience that is not disgusted and cannot be turned away by our sin. These things being presupposed it is true; and the prayer of my text, that God would comfort, can have no firmer foundation than the confidence of my text, that God has given "everlasting consolation and good hope through grace." "Thou hast helped us; leave us not, neither forsake us, O God of our salvation."

III.—The last thing here is the petitions based upon



the contemplation of the Divine hearers of the prayer and of the gift already bestowed by God.

May He "comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work." I have already said all that perhaps is necessary in regard of the connection between the past gift of everlasting consolation and the present and future comforting of hearts which is here desired. It seems to me that the Apostle has in his mind the distinction between the great work of Christ, in which are supplied for us the materials for comfort and hope, and the present and continuous work of that Divine Spirit, by which God dwelling in our hearts in Jesus Christ makes real for each of us the universal gift of consolation and of hope. God has bestowed the materials for comfort; God will give the comfort for which He has supplied the materials. It were a poor thing if all that we could expect from our loving Father in the heavens were that He should contribute to us what might make us peaceful and glad and calm in sorrow, if we chose to use it. Men comfort from without; God steals into the heart, and there diffuses the aroma of His presence. Christ comes into the ship before He says, "Peace! be still!" It is not enough for our poor troubled hearts that there should be calmness and consolation twining round the Cross if we choose to pluck the fruit. We need, and therefore we have, an indwelling God who, by that Spirit which is the Comforter, will make for each of us the everlasting consolation which He has bestowed upon the world our individual possession. God's husbandry is not merely broadcast sowing of the seed, but the planting in each individual heart of the precious germ. And the God who has given everlast-



ing consolation to a whole world will comfort *thy* heart.

Then, again, the comforted heart will be a stable heart. Our fixedness and stability are not natural immobility, but communicated steadfastness. There must be, first, the consolation of Christ before there can be the calmness of a settled heart. We all know how vacillating, how driven to and fro by gusts of passion and winds of doctrine and forces of earth our resolutions and spirits are. But thistledown glued to a firm surface will be firm, and any light thing lashed to a solid one will be solid; and reeds shaken with the wind may be turned into brazen pillars that cannot be moved. If we have Christ in our hearts, He will be our consolation first and our stability next. Why should it be that we are spasmodic and fluctuating, and the slaves of ups and downs, like some barometer in stormy weather; now at "set fair," and then away down where "much rain" is written? There is no need for it. Get Christ into your heart, and your mercury will stand at one height. Why should it be that at one hour the flashing waters fill the harbour, and that six hours afterwards there is a waste of ooze and filth? It need not be. Our hearts may be like some land-locked lake that knows no tide. "His heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord."

The comforted and stable heart will be a fruitful heart. "In *every* good word and work." Ah! how fragmentary is our goodness, like the broken torsos or the statues of fair gods dug up in some classic land. There is no reason why each of us should not appropriate and make our own the forms of goodness to which we are least naturally inclined, and cultivate

and possess a symmetrical, fully-developed, all-round goodness, in some humble measure after the pattern of Jesus Christ our Lord. Practical righteousness, "in every good word and work," is the outcome of all the sacred and secret consolations and blessings that Jesus Christ imparts. There are many Christian people who are like those swallow-holes, as they call them, characteristic of limestone countries, where a great river plunges into a cave and is no more heard of. You do not get your comforts and your blessing for that, brother, but in order that all the joy and peace, all the calmness and the communion, that you realize in the secret place of the Most High, may be translated into goodness and manifest righteousness in the market-place and the street. We get our goodness where we get our consolation, from Jesus Christ and His Cross.

And so, dear friends, all your comforts will die, and your sorrows will live, unless you have Christ for your own. The former will be like some application that is put on a poisoned bite, which will soothe it for a moment, but as soon as the anodyne dries off the skin, the poison will tingle and burn again, and will be working in the blood, whilst the remedy only touched the surface of the flesh. All your hopes will be like a child's castles on the sand, which the next tide will smooth out and obliterate, unless your hope is fixed on Him. You may have everlasting consolation, you may have a hope which will enable you to look serenely on the ills of life, and on the darkness of death, and on what darkly looms beyond death. You may have a calmed and steadied heart; you may have an all-round, stable, comprehensive goodness.

But there is only one way to get these blessings, and that is to grasp and make our own, by simple faith and constant clinging, that great gift, given once for all in Jesus Christ, the gift of comfort that never dies, and of hope that never deceives, and then to apply that gift day by day, through God's good Spirit, to sorrows and trials and duties as they emerge.



### III.

## The Heart's Home and Guide.

"THE Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ."—2 THESS. iii. 5.



WORD or two of explanation of terms may preface our remarks on this, the third of the Apostle's prayers for the Thessalonians in this letter. The first point to be noticed is that by "the Lord" here is meant, as usually in the New Testament, Jesus Christ. So that here again we have the distinct recognition of His Divinity, and the direct address of prayer to Him.

The next thing to notice is that by "the love of God" is here meant, not God's to us, but ours to Him; and that the petition, therefore, respects the emotions and sentiments of the Thessalonians towards the Father in heaven.

And the last point is that the rendering of the Authorized Version, "patient waiting for Christ," is better exchanged for that of the Revised Version, "the patience of Christ," meaning thereby the same patience as He exhibited in His earthly life, and which He is ready to bestow upon us.

It is not usual in the New Testament to find Jesus

Christ set forth as the great Example of patient endurance; but still there are one or two instances in which the same expression is applied to Him. For example, in two contiguous verses in the Epistle to the Hebrews, we read of His "enduring contradiction of sinners against Himself," and "enduring the cross, despising the shame," in both of which cases we have the verb employed of which the noun is here used. Then in the Apocalypse we have such expressions as "the patience of Christ," of which John says that he and his brethren whom he is addressing are "participators," and, again, "thou hast kept the word of my patience."

So, though unusual, the thought of our text as presented in the amended version is by no means singular. These things, then, being premised, we may now look at this petition as a whole.

I.—The first thought that it suggests to me is, the home of the heart.

"The Lord direct you *into* the love of God and the patience of Christ." The prayers in this letter with which we have been occupied for some Sundays present to us Christian perfection under various aspects. But this we may, perhaps, say is the most comprehensive and condensed of them all. The Apostle gathers up the whole sum of his desires for his friends, and presents to us the whole aim of our efforts for ourselves, in these two things, a steadfast love to God, and a calm endurance of evil and persistence in duty, unaffected by suffering or by pain. If we have these two we shall not be far from being what God wishes to see us.

Now the Apostle's thought here, of "leading us

into" these two, seems to suggest the metaphor of a great home with two chambers in it, of which the inner was entered from the outer. The first room is "the love of God," and the second is "the patience of Christ." It comes to the same thing whether we speak of the heart as dwelling in love, or of love as dwelling in the heart. The metaphor varies, the substance of the thought is the same, and that thought is that the heart should be the sphere and subject of a steadfast, habitual, all-pleasing love, which issues in unbroken calmness of endurance and persistence of service, in the face of evil.

Let us look, then, for a moment at these two points. I need not dwell upon the bare idea of love to God as being the characteristic of the Christian attitude towards Him, or remind you of how strange and unexampled a thing it is that all religion should be reduced to this one fruitful germ, love to the Father in heaven. But it is more to the purpose for me to point to the constancy, the unbrokenness, the depth, which the Apostle here desires should be the characteristics of Christian love to God. We sometimes cherish such emotion; but, alas, how rare it is for us to dwell in that calm home all the days of our lives! We visit that serene sanctuary at intervals, and then for the rest of our days we are hurried to and fro between contending affections, and wander homeless amidst inadequate loves. But what Paul asked, and what should be the conscious aim of the Christian life, is, that we should "dwell all our days in the house of the Lord, to behold His beauty and to enquire in His Temple."

Alas, when we think of our own experiences, how

fair and far seems that other, contemplated as a possibility in my text, that our hearts should "abide in the love of God"!

Let me remind you, too, that steadfastness of habitual love all round our hearts, as it were, is the source and germ of all perfectness of life and conduct. "Love, and do as Thou wilt," is a bold saying, but not too bold. For the very essence of love is the smelting of the will of the lover into the will of the beloved. And there is nothing so certain as that, in regard of all human relations, and in regard of the relation to God which in many respects follows, and is moulded after the pattern of our earthly relations of love, to have the heart fixed in pure affection is to have the whole life subordinated in glad obedience. Nothing is so sweet as to do the beloved's will. The germ of all righteousness, as well as the characteristic spirit of every righteous deed, lies in love to God. This is the mother-tincture which, variously coloured and with various additions, makes all the different precious liquids which we can pour as libations on His altar. The one saving salt of all deeds in reference to Him is that they are the outcome and expression of a loving heart. He who loves is righteous, and doeth righteousness. So, "love is the fulfilling of the law."

That the heart should be fixed in its abode in love to God is the secret of all blessedness, as it is the source of all righteousness. Love is always joy in itself; it is the one deliverance from self—bondage to which self is the one curse and misery of man. The emancipation from care and sorrow and unrest lies in that going out of ourselves which we call by the name of love. There be things masquerading



about the world, and profaning the sacred name of love by taking it to themselves, which are only selfishness under a disguise. But true love is the annihilation, and therefore the apotheosis and glorifying of self; and in that annihilation lies the secret charm which brings all blessedness into a life.

But, then, though love in itself be always bliss, yet, by reason of the imperfections of its objects, it sometimes leads to sorrow. For limitations and disappointments and inadequacies of all sorts haunt our earthly loves whilst they last; and we have all to see them fade, or to fade away from them. The thing you love may change, the thing you love must die; and therefore love, which in itself is blessedness, hath often, like the little book that the prophet swallowed, a bitter taste remaining when the sweetness is gone. But if we set our hearts on God, we set our hearts on that which knows no variableness, neither the shadow of turning. *There* are no inadequate responses, no changes that we need fear. On that love the scythe of death, which mows down all other products of the human heart, hath no power; and its stem stands untouched by the keen edge that levels all the rest of the herbage. Love God, and thou lovest Eternity; and therefore the joy of the love is eternal as its object. So he who loves God is building upon a rock. And whosoever has this for his treasure carries his wealth with him whithersoever he goes.

Well may the Apostle gather into one potent word, and one mighty wish, the whole fulness of his desires for his friends. And wise shall we be if we make this the chiefest of our aims, that our hearts may have their home in the love of God.

Still further, there is another chamber in this house of the soul. The outer room, where the heart inhabits that loves God, leads into another compartment, "the patience of Christ."

Now, I suppose I need not remind many of you that this great New Testament word "patience" has a far wider area of meaning than that which is ordinarily covered by that expression. For *patience*, as we use it, is simply a passive virtue. But the thing that is meant by the New Testament word which is generally so rendered has an active as well as a passive side. On the passive side it is the calm, uncomplaining, unreluctant submission of the will to whatsoever evil may come upon us, either directly from God's hand, or through the ministration and mediation of "men who are His sword." On the active side it is the steadfast persistence in the path of duty, in spite of all that may array itself against us. So there are the two halves of the virtue which is here put before us—uncomplaining submission and bold continuance in well-doing, whatsoever storms may hurtle in our faces.

Now, in both of these aspects, the life of Jesus Christ is the great pattern. As for the passive side, need I remind you how, "as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth"? "When He was reviled He reviled not again, but committed Himself unto Him that judgeth uprightly." No anger ever flushed His cheek or contracted His brow. He never repaid scorn with scorn, nor hate with hate. All men's malice fell upon Him, like sparks upon wet timber, and kindled no conflagration.

As for the active side, I need not remind you how

“He set His face to go to Jerusalem”—how the great solemn “*must*” which ruled His life bore Him on, steadfast and without deflection in His course, through all obstacles. There never was such heroic force as the quiet force of the meek and gentle Christ, which wasted no strength in displaying or boasting of itself, but simply, silently, unconquerably, like the secular motions of the stars, dominated all opposition, and carried Him, unhasting and unresting, on His path. That life, with all its surface of meekness, had an iron tenacity of purpose beneath, which may well stand for our example. Like some pure glacier from an Alpine peak, it comes silently, slowly down into the valley; and though to the eye it seems not to move, it presses on with a force sublime in its silence and gigantic in its gentleness, and buries beneath it the rocks that stand in its way. The patience of Christ is the very sublimity of persistence in well-doing. It is our example, and more than our example—it is His gift to us.

Such passive and active patience is the direct fruit of love to God. The one chamber opens into the other. For they whose hearts dwell in the sweet sanctities of the love of God will ever be those who say, with a calm smile, as they put out their hand to the bitterest draught, “the cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?”

Love, and evil dwindles; love, and duty becomes supreme; and in the submission of the will, which is the true issue of love, lies the foundation of indomitable and inexhaustible endurance and perseverance.

Nor need I remind you, I suppose, that in this resolve to do the will of God, in spite of all antagon-

ism and opposition, lies a condition at once of moral perfection and of blessedness. So, dear friends, if we would have a home for our hearts, let us pass into that sweet, calm, inexpugnable fortress provided for us in the love of God and the patience of Christ.

II.—Now notice, secondly, the Guide of the heart to its home.

“The Lord direct you.” I have already explained that we have here a distinct address to Jesus Christ as Divine, and the Hearer of prayer. The Apostle evidently expects a present, personal influence from Christ to be exerted upon men’s hearts. And this is the point to which I desire to draw your attention in a word or two. We are far too oblivious of the present influence of Jesus Christ, by His Spirit, upon the hearts of men that trust Him. We have very imperfectly apprehended our privileges as Christians if our faith do not expect, and if our experience have not realized, the inward guidance of Christ moment by moment in our daily lives. I believe that much of the present feebleness of the Christian life amongst its professors is to be traced to the fact that their thoughts about Jesus Christ are predominantly thoughts of what He did nineteen centuries ago, and that the proportion of faith is not observed in their perspective of His work, and that they do not sufficiently realize that to-day, here, in you and me, if we have faith in Him, He is verily and really putting forth His power.

Paul’s prayer is but an echo of Christ’s promise. The Master said, “He shall guide you into all truth.” The servant prays, “The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God.” And if we rightly know the whole

blessedness that is ours in the gift of Jesus Christ, we shall recognize His present guidance as a reality in our lives.

That guidance is given to us mainly by the Divine Spirit laying upon our hearts the great facts which evoke our answering love to God. "We love Him because He first loved us"; and the way by which Jesus directs our hearts into the love of God is mainly by shedding abroad God's love to us in our spirits by the Holy Spirit which is given to us.

But, besides that, all these movements in our hearts, so often neglected, so often resisted, by which we are impelled to a holier life, to a deeper love, to a more unworldly consecration—all these, rightly understood, are Christ's directions. He leads us, though often we know not the hand that guides, and every Christian may be sure of this—and he is sinful if he does not live up to the height of his privileges—that the ancient promises are more than fulfilled in his experience, and that he has a present Christ, an in-dwelling Christ, who will be his Shepherd, and lead him by green pastures and still waters sometimes, and through valleys of darkness and rough defiles sometimes, but always with the purpose of bringing him nearer and nearer to the full possession of the love of God and the patience of Christ.

The vision which shone before the eyes of the father of the forerunner, was that the Dayspring from on high hath visited us, to "guide our feet into the way of peace." It is fulfilled in Jesus, who directs our hearts into love and patience, which are the way of peace.

We are not to look for impressions and impulses

distinguishable from the operations of our own inward man. We are not to fall into the error of supposing that a conviction of duty or a conception of truth is of Divine origin because it is strong. But the true test of their Divine origin is their correspondence with the written word, the standard of truth and life. Jesus guides us to a fuller apprehension of the great facts of the infinite love of God in the Cross. Shedding abroad a Saviour's love does kindle ours.

III.—Lastly, notice the heart's yielding to its Guide.

If this was Paul's prayer for his converts, it should be our aim for ourselves. Christ is ready to direct our hearts, if we will let Him. All depends on our yielding to that sweet direction, loving as that of a mother's hand on her child's shoulder.

What is our duty and wisdom in view of these truths? The answer may be thrown into the shape of one or two brief counsels.

First, desire it. Do you Christian people want to be led to love God more? Are you ready to love the world less, which you will have to do if you love God more? Do you wish Christ to lay His hand upon you, and withdraw you from much, that He may draw you into the sanctities and sublimities of His own experienced love? I do not think the lives of some of us look very like as if we should welcome that direction. And it is a sharp test, and a hard commandment to say to a Christian professor, "Desire to be led into the love of God."

Again, expect it. Do not dismiss all that I have been saying about a present Christ leading men by their own impulses, which are His monitions, as fanatical and mystical and far away from daily experi-



ence. Ah! it is not only the boy Samuel whose infancy was an excuse for his ignorance, who takes God's voice to be only white-bearded Eli's. There are many of us who, when Christ speaks, think it is only a human voice. Perhaps His deep and gentle tones are thrilling through my harsh and feeble one; and He is now, even by the poor reed through which He breathes His breath, saying to some of you, "Come near to Me." Expect the guidance.

Still your own wills that you may hear His voice. How can you be led if you never look at the Guide? How can you hear that still small voice amidst the clattering of spindles, and the roar of wagons, and the noises in your own heart? Be still, and He will speak.

Follow the guidance, and at once, for delay is fatal. Like a man walking behind a guide across some morass, set your feet in the prints of the Master's and keep close at His heels, and then you will be safe. And so, dear friends, if we want to have anchorage for our love, let us set our love on God, who alone is worthy of it, and who alone of all its objects will neither fail us nor change. If we would have the temper which lifts us above the ills of life and enables us to keep our course unaffected by them all, as the gentle moon moves with the same silent, equable pace through piled masses of cloud and clear stretches of sky, we must attain submission through love, and gain unreluctant endurance and steadfast wills from the example and source of both, the gentle and strong Christ. If we would have our hearts calm, we must let Him guide them, sway them, curb their vagrancies, stimulate their desires, and satisfy the desires which



He has stimulated. We must abandon self, and say, "Lord, I cannot guide myself. Do Thou direct my wandering feet." The prayer will not be in vain. He will guide us with His eye, and that directing of our hearts will issue in experiences of love and patience, whose "very sweetness yieldeth proof that they were born for immortality." The Guide and the road foreshadow the goal. The only natural end to which such a path can lead and such guidance point is a heaven of perfect love, where patience has done its perfect work, and is called for no more. The experience of present direction strengthens the hope of future perfection. So we may take for our own the triumphant confidence of the Psalmist, and embrace the nearest and the remotest future in one calm vision of faith that "Thou wilt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory."



#### IV.

### The Lord of Peace and the Peace of the Lord.

"Now the Lord of Peace Himself give you peace always, by all means. The Lord be with you all,"—2 THESS. iii. 16.



WE have reached here the last of the brief outbursts of prayer which characterize this letter, and bear witness to the Apostle's affection for his Thessalonian converts. It is the deepening of the ordinary Jewish formula of meeting and parting. We find that, in most of his letters, the Apostle begins with wishing "grace and peace," and closes with an echo of the wish. "Peace be unto you" was often a form which meant nothing. But true religion turns conventional insincerities into real, heartfelt desires. It was often a wish destined to remain unfulfilled. But loving wishes are potent when they are changed into petitions.

The relation between the two clauses of my text seems to be that the second, "The Lord be with you all," is not so much a separate, additional supplication as rather the fuller statement, in the form of prayer, of the means by which the former supplication is to

be accomplished. "The Lord of Peace" gives peace by giving His own presence. This, then, is the supreme desire of the Apostle, that Christ may be with them all, and in His presence they may find the secret of tranquillity.

I.—The deepest longing of every human soul is for peace.

There are many ways in which the supreme good may be represented, but perhaps none of them is so lovely, and exercises such universal fascination of attraction, as that which presents it in the form of rest. It is an eloquent testimony to the unrest which tortures every heart that the promise of peace should to all seem so fair. It may be presented and aimed at in very ignoble and selfish ways. It may be sought for in cowardly shirking of duty, in sluggish avoidance of effort, in selfish absorption, apart from all the miseries of mankind. It may be sought for in the ignoble paths of mere pleasure, amidst the sanctities of human love, amidst the nobilities of intellectual effort and pursuit. But all men in all their workings are aiming at rest of spirit, and only in such rest does blessedness lie. "There is no joy but calm." It is better than all the excitements of conflict, and better than the flush of victory. Rest which is not apathy, rest which is not indolence, rest which is contemporaneous with, and the consequence of, the full wholesome activity of the whole nature in its legitimate directions, that is the thing that we are all longing for. The sea is not stagnant, though it be calm. There will be the slow heave of the calm billow, and the wavelets may sparkle in the sunlight, though they be still from all

the winds that rave. Deep in every human heart, in yours and mine, brother, is this cry for rest and peace. Let us see to it that we do not mistranslate the meaning of the longing, or fancy that it can be found in the ignoble, the selfish, the worldly ways to which I have referred. We want, most of all, peace in our inmost hearts.

II.—Then the second thing to be suggested here is that the Lord of Peace Himself is the only Giver of Peace.

I suppose I may take for granted, on the part at least of the members of my own congregation, some remembrance of a former discourse upon another of these petitions, in which I pointed out how, in phraseology analogous to that of my text, there were the distinct reference to the divinity of Jesus Christ, the distinct presentation of prayer to Him, the implication of His present activity upon Christian hearts.

And here again we have the august and majestic "Himself." Here again we have the distinct reference of the title "Lord" to Jesus. And here again we have plainly prayer to Him.

But the title by which He is addressed is profoundly significant, "The Lord of Peace." Now we find, in another of Paul's letters, in immediate conjunction with His teaching, that casting all our care upon God is the sure way to bring the peace of God into our hearts, the title "the God of Peace"; and he employs the same phraseology in another of his letters, when he prays that the "God of Peace" would fill the Roman Christians "with all joy and peace in believing."

So, then, here is a title which is all but distinctively Divine. "The *Lord of Peace*" is brought into parallelism and equality with "the God of Peace"; which were blasphemy unless the underlying implication was that Jesus Christ Himself was Divine.

He is the "Lord of Peace" because that tranquillity of heart and spirit, that unruffled calm which we all see from afar, and long to possess, was verily His, in His Manhood, during all the calamities and changes and activities of His earthly life. I have said that "peace" is not apathy, that it is not indifference, that it is not self-absorption. Look at the life of the "Lord of Peace." In Him there were wholesome human emotions. He sorrowed, He wept, He wondered, He was angry, He pitied, He loved. And yet all these were perfectly consistent with the unruffled calm which marked His whole career. So peace is not stolid indifference, nor is it to be found in the avoidance of difficult duties, or the cowardly shirking of sacrifices and pains and struggles; but rather it is "peace subsisting at the heart of endless agitation," of which the great Example stands in Him who was "the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief," and who yet, in it all, was "the Lord of Peace."

Why was Christ's Manhood so perfectly tranquil? The secret lies here. It was a Manhood in unbroken communion with the Father. And what was the secret of that unbroken communion with the Father? It lies here, in the perfect submission of His will. Resignation is peace. The surrender of self-will is peace. Obedience is peace. Trust is peace. And fellowship with the Divine is peace. So Christ has taught us in His life. "The Father hath not left Me

alone, because I do always the things that please Him." And therein He has marked out for us the path of righteousness and communion, which is ever the path of peace. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee." That is the secret of the tranquillity of the ever-calm Christ.

Being thus the Lord of Peace, inasmuch as it was His own constant and unbroken possession, He is the sole Giver of it to others.

Ah! brethren, our hearts want far more, for their stable restfulness, than we can find in any hand, or in any heart, except those of Jesus Christ Himself. For what do we need? We need, in order that we should know the sweetness of repose, an adequate object for every part of our nature. If we find something that is good and sweet and satisfying for some portion of this complex being of ours, all its other hungry desires are apt to be left unappeased. So we are shuttle-cocked from one wish to another, and bandied about from one partial satisfaction to another, and in them all it is but segments of our being that are satisfied, whilst all the rest of the circumference remains disquieted. We need that, in one attainable and single object, there shall be at once that which will subjugate the will, that which will illuminate and appease the conscience, that which will satisfy the seeking intellect, and hold forth the promise of endless progress in insight and knowledge, that which will meet all the desires of our ravenous clamant nature, and that which will fill every creek and cranny of our empty hearts as with the flashing brightness of an inflowing tide.

And where shall we find all these, but in One dear heart, and where shall we discern the one Object, whom, possessing, we have enough; and without whom, possessing all beside, we are mendicants and starving? Where, but in that dear Lord who Himself will supply all our needs, and will minister to us peace, because for will and conscience and intellect and affections and desires He supplies the pabulum that they require, and gives more than enough for their satisfaction?

We want, if we are to be at rest, that there shall be some absolute control over our passions, lusts, desires, which torture us for ever, as long as they are ungoverned. There is only one Hand which will take the wild beasts of our nature, bind them in the silken leash of His love, and lead them along, tamed and obedient.

We want, for our peace, that all our relations with circumstances and men around us shall be rectified. And who is there that can bring about such harmony between us and our surroundings that calamities shall not press upon us with their heaviest weight, nor opposing circumstances kindle angry resistance, but only patient perseverance and thankful persistence in the path of duty? It is only Christ that can regulate our relations to the things and the men around us, and make all things work together to our consciousness for our good.

Further, if we are to be at rest, and possess any true, fundamental, and stable tranquillity, we want that our relations with God shall consciously be rectified and made blessed. And I, for my part, do not believe that any man comes into the full sweetness



of an assured friendship with God, except he comes to it by the road of faith in that Saviour in whom God draws near to us with tenderness in His heart, and blessings dropping from His open hands. To be at peace with God is the beginning of all true tranquillity, and that can be secured only by faith in Jesus Christ.

So, because He brings the reconciliation between man and God, because He brings the rectification of our relation to circumstances and men, because He brings the control of desires and passions and inclinations, and because He satisfies all the capacities of our natures, in Him, and in Him only, is there peace for us.

III.—So note, thirdly, that the peace of the Lord of Peace is perfect.

“Give you peace always.” That points to perpetual, unbroken duration in time, and through all changing circumstances which might threaten a less stable and deeply-rooted tranquillity. And then, “by all means,” as our Authorized Version has it, or, better, “in all ways,” as the Revised Version reads, the reference being, not so much to the various manners in which the Divine peace is to be bestowed, as to the various aspects which that peace is capable of assuming. Christ’s peace, then, is perpetual and multiform, unbroken, and presenting itself in all the aspects in which tranquillity is possible for a human spirit.

It is possible, then, thinks Paul, that there shall be in our hearts a deep tranquillity, over which disasters, calamities, sorrows, losses, need have no power. There is no necessity why, when my outward life is troubled, my inward life should be perturbed. There may be

light in the dwellings of Goshen, while darkness lies over all the land of Egypt. The peace which Christ gives is no exemption from warfare, but is realized in the midst of warfare. It is no immunity from sorrows, but is then most felt when the storm of sorrow beating upon us is patiently accepted. The rainbow steadfastly stands spanning the tortured waters of the cataract. The fire may burn, like that old Greek fire, beneath the water. The surface may be agitated, but the centre may be calm. It is not calamity that breaks our peace, but it is the resistance of our wills to the calamity which troubles us. When we can bow and submit and say, "Thy will be done," "it seemeth good to Thee, do as Thou wilt," then nothing can break the peace of God in our hearts. We seek in the wrong quarter for peace when we seek it in the disposition of outward things according to our wills. We seek in the right way when we seek it in the disposition of our wills according to the will of the Father manifest in our circumstances. There may be peace always, even whilst the storms, efforts, and calamities of life are in full operation around us and on us. That peace may be uninterrupted and uniform, extended on one high level, as it were, through all our lives. It is not so with us, dear brethren; there are ups and downs which are our own fault. The peace of God may be permanent, but, in order that it should be, there must be permanent communion and permanent obedience.

Further, says the Apostle, Christ's peace will not manifest itself in one form only, but in all the shapes in which peace is possible. There are many enemies that beset this calmness of spirit; for them all there

is the appropriate armour and defence in the peace of God. I have already enumerated in part some of the requirements for true and permanent tranquillity of soul. All these are met in the peace of Christ. Whatever it is that disturbs men, He has His anodyne that will soothe. If circumstances threaten, if men array themselves against us, if our own evil hearts rise up in rebellion, if our passions disturb us, if our consciences accuse: for all these Christ brings tranquillity and calm. In every way in which men can be disturbed, and in every way, therefore, in which peace can be manifest, Christ's gift avails. "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

IV.—Lastly, "the Lord of Peace" gives it by giving His own presence.

The Thessalonians, as they listened to Paul's first prayer, might think to themselves, "Always, in all ways. That is a large petition! Can it be fulfilled?" And so the Apostle adds, "The Lord be with you all." You cannot separate Christ's gifts from Christ. The only way to get anything that He gives is to get Him. It is His presence that does everything. If He is with me, the world's annoyances will seem very small. If I hold His hand I shall not be much troubled. If I can only nestle close to His side, and come under His cloak, He will shield me from the cold blast, from whatever part it blows. If my heart is twined around Him it will partake of the stability and calm of the great heart on which it rests.

The secret of tranquillity is the presence of Christ. When He is in the vessel the waves calm themselves. So, Christian men and women, if you and I are

conscious of breaches of our restfulness, interruptions of our tranquillity by reason of surging, impatient passions, and hot desires within ourselves, or by reason of the pressure of outward circumstances, or by reason of our having fallen beneath our consciences, and done wrong things, let us understand that the breaches of our peace are not owing to Him, but only to our having let go His hand. It is our own faults if we are ever troubled; if we kept close to Him we should not be. It is our own faults if the world ever agitates us beyond the measure that is compatible with central calm. Sorrow should not have the power to touch the citadel of our lives. Effort should not have the power to withdraw us from our trustful repose in Him. And nothing here would have the power, if we did not let our hands slip out of His, and break our communion with Him.

So, dear brethren, "in the world ye shall have tribulation, in Me ye shall have peace." Keep inside the fortress and nothing will disturb. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." The only place where that hungry, passion-ridden heart of yours, conscious of alienation from God, can find rest, is close by Jesus Christ. "The Lord be with us all," and then the peace of that Lord shall clothe and fill our hearts in Christ Jesus.



## V.

### Love Made Visible.

“THE grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us . . .”—TITUS ii. 11, 12.



HERE is a marked preponderance of practical exhortations over doctrinal statements in the last letters of the Apostle. That characteristic has led to doubts of their genuineness; but it is susceptible of a much simpler explanation. The old man addressing two young helpers, Timothy and Titus, who were sent to look after young churches, naturally gives prominence to such practical duties. His age, and the purpose of the letters, sufficiently explain the prevailing tone.

But though practice predominates, doctrine is by no means absent, and when it does appear, is remarkably full-toned, energetic, and in entire consonance with the teaching of the earlier Epistles. And it is further to be noted that the morality is clearly the outcome of the theology. In these letters, as in the whole of the Scriptures, there are neither, on the one hand, abstract statements of theological truth divorced from conduct, nor, on the other hand,

undogmatical morality. Every precept is rooted in the soil of doctrine.

So, for instance, the context has been laying down a number of very homely exhortations in reference to conduct. In the immediately preceding words, slaves have been directed to "show all fidelity" to their masters; and to "adorn the doctrine" of their "Saviour in all things." And these exhortations are here in my text, by means of that great "for," based upon this grand and remarkable statement of the very inmost essence and great purpose of the whole revelation of God in Christ Jesus.

"For," says the Apostle, "the grace of God, that bringeth salvation to all men, hath appeared, teaching us."

We have, then, here three points to consider—the appearance of the grace, its extent, and its work.

I.—First, then, the Apostle sets forth, as the foundation of all, the appearance of the grace of God.

Now, I suppose that the force of the words of my text is often weakened to ordinary readers by the very familiarity and threadbareness of that theological word, "grace," and we want to translate it into something that comes a little more closely to our ordinary phraseology and experience. What, then, is meant here by the "grace of God" that has appeared? Nothing else than this, the love of God in exercise towards creatures who, by reason of their lowliness and ill desert, might well have expected another kind of manifestation of the Divine nature. Grace, the theological term which, to many of us, sounds so cold and unreal and remote, is all throbbing with tenderness and warmth of life if we understand what it



means. It means the pulsation of the heart of God pouring a tide of gracious love on sinful men, who do not deserve one drop of it to fall upon them, and who dwell so far beneath His loftiness that the love is made still more wonderful by the condescension which makes it possible. The lofty loves the low, and the love is grace. The righteous loves the sinful, and the love is grace.

Then, says my text, there is something which has made this Divine love of God, so wonderful in its loftiness, and equally wonderful in its passing by men's sinfulness, visible to men. The grace has "appeared." The same word is used in telling of the stormy darkness when "neither sun nor stars" had for many days "*appeared*," and then at last a rift came in the thick cloud, and the blue was seen, and the blessed sunshine poured down on the damp and desolate world. So, by some historical manifestation, this mighty thing, the love of God, has been put into concrete shape, embodied and made a visibility to men. What can that point to except the incarnation of Jesus Christ, His life and death, the cradle and the cross, with all that lay between, and all that has come after? The mission of a Saviour, in whom the Unseen has drawn near to human sense; in whom the love of God, like sunbeams caught in a cloud, has been diffused, encircled with a revealing because a veiling medium, is what Paul points to. The Man Christ Jesus, in the sweetness of His life, in the sacred mystery of His death, in the power of His indwelling Spirit, stands before us, the embodiment of the love of the unseen God. Scientists can make sounds visible by the symmetrical lines into which heaps of



sand upon a bit of paper are cast by the vibration of a string. God has made invisible love plain to the sight of all men, because He has sent us His Son, and now we can say, "That which we have seen with our eyes, that which we have beheld, and our hands have handled of the word of life, that declare we unto you." We need that to sense love shall be made visible, in order that by spirit love shall be credible. Therefore, He has stooped from the heavens, and miracle of miracles, and mercy beyond all mercy! has put into actual outward form the sublime and soul-satisfying fact that He loves. Grace bends from the heavens to the low earth, and brushes aside the black obstacles in its path which our sins have reared.

There is no other ground of certainty that God is love but the fact that God's Son took human form and died for us and for our salvation. Apart from that we are left to forebodings, hopes dashed with fears, wishes thrown back upon themselves in a tangle of perplexity whether they will ever be fulfilled; but if we can turn to that life and that death, and look at them from the point of view from which the Scripture looks at them, as visible embodiments of the invisible love, then we can be sure, and we can be sure by no other means, that God in very deed has a heart of love to each of us. There are other ways of coming within sight of that great truth, but these are all imperfect, roundabout, subject to all manner of limitations and contradictions and doubts. But the "grace hath appeared," as the sun rises on the earth, in Jesus Christ. "God hath established"—or proved—"His love to us in that whilst we were yet sinners Christ

died for us." Is there anything else to which you can point and say, "By that I am more certain of God's love than I am of my own existence"?

II.—Secondly, notice the universal sweep of this grace.

I do not need to do more than explain that the true relation of clauses in my text is not given in the Authorized Version, but is found in the Revised Version. What the Apostle says is not that the grace of God has appeared to all men. That is not true; it was not true in his time, it is not true to-day. And if it were true, it is nothing to the purpose in the present context to dwell upon the appearance to all men. But it breaks the whole flow of the sentence, and makes it inconceivably clumsy, that he should say, "The grace of God has appeared to *all* men, teaching *us*." The words, therefore, are much more naturally connected with the other portion of the verse, and should be read, "The grace of God, that bringeth salvation to all men, hath appeared."

It brings salvation to all men. It does not follow from that, that all men take the salvation which it brings. I should say of a medicine that it was a universal cure, meaning thereby that it was capable of curing all, and that it was offered to all indiscriminately, without being supposed to say anything whatsoever concerning the actual numbers who took it, and who thereby were cured. And this "grace," this manifestation of the Divine love, has stamped upon it its destination for the word and has no limitations, nor is there any side of it which, to any human heart, turns but a phase of darkness. It is light all through, it is light all round, it is light for every eye, it brings

salvation to all men ; whether all men take the salvation that it brings or no.

Notice the underlying theory of a universal need that lies in these words. The grace brings *salvation* to all men, because all men need that more than anything else. In the notion of salvation there lie the two ideas of danger and of disease. It is healing and it is safety ; therefore, if it be offered to all, it is because all men are sick of a sore disease, and stand in imminent and deadly peril. That is the only theory of men's deepest need which is true to the facts of human existence. There are plenty of shallower diagnoses of what is the matter with mankind, and therefore of less radical and drastic cures offered. I have not a word to say against any of them, which, in their places, and for the purposes to which they may wisely be confined, are good and wholesome for mankind. But we want to dig far deeper than the shallow husbandry of agriculturists who have no tools but education, culture, reformation of manners, and alteration of the conditions of society, can ever reach. All these things are needed : God forbid that I should say a word that seems to cast any kind of a slight upon any of them, but I want them to come as consequences of something far deeper and more thorough, and I desire that we should all feel that no such superficial clearings up and smoothings will deal adequately with the deep-seated diseases of humanity. You may do much for a man, but you cannot "save" him unless you deal with the corruptions of his heart. And my old-fashioned, narrow belief is that there is nothing that will deal with these except this—"The grace of God

hath appeared." Get a man to believe that, and all the rest will come, if he is a wise man and rightly guided.

I am not preaching a Gospel that has no care for other than the deepest needs, but a Gospel which, dealing first with the deepest needs, then evolves satisfaction for all wants, and has in itself a power of rectifying everything that is wrong. The universal medicine is the Cross and Him that hung upon it, and all men need that, because all men are sick with a sickness which ends in death, the sickness of sin and of separation from God.

III.—Lastly, notice the great work of this grace made visible.

It seems to be a wonderful descent from "the grace of God which bringeth salvation to all hath appeared" to "*teaching* us." Is that all? Is that worth much? If by "*teaching*" we mean merely a reiteration in words, addressed to the understanding or the heart, of the great principles of morality and conduct, it is a very poor thing, and a tremendous come-down from the Apostle's previous words. Such an office is not what the world wants. There is plenty of first-rate teaching in the world, without Jesus Christ and His grace. If men and nations go to the devil their own wicked, wilful way, it is not for want of teaching. But to try and cure the world's evils by teaching, in that narrow sense of the expression, is something like trying to put a fire out by reading the Riot Act to the flames. You want fire engines, and not paper proclamations, in order to stay their devouring course.

But it is to be noticed that the expression here, in

the original, means a great deal more than that kind of teaching. It means *correcting*, or chastening. It is the same word that is employed, for instance, in the well-known phrase, "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth," and when Christ from Heaven says, "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten." It implies the notion of correction generally by pain, at all events of discipline, of something done, and not merely something said, of a process brought to bear on the sensitive nature. And such a work of correcting and chastening is a worthy work for "the grace that appears."

Why is it that teaching is not enough? Because men do not go wrong for want of knowledge, but for weakness of will and strength of passion. And, therefore, what is needed is not mere illumination, but a sound eye. What is needed is not the declaration of truth, but some power that will weaken passion, that will strengthen conscience, that will supply motives for action, that will dominate and sway the corrupt and captive will. And if the grace of God, the love of God in its exercise towards inferior and sinful men, who need salvation because they are in danger and sick of a sore sickness, is to do anything, it must "come with a rod." For all growth in holiness and purity, for all acquisition of nobleness and virtue, for all living after the pattern of Jesus Christ, and according to the will of God, there must be suffering, and scourging, and smiting and sore pains, and much sharp cauterizing and amputation, or else there will be no healing and no growth. It needs a great deal of courage to bear being sanctified; we need a great deal of willing submission to very sharp and drastic treatment in

order to be healed of our diseases. Our Physician has in His great medicine-chest balm and bandages for all wounds. But He has also a terrible array of gleaming blades with sharp edges, and of materials for cauterizing and burning away proud flesh. And if ever we are to be made good and pure, as God wants to make us, it must be through a discipline that will often be agony, and will always be pain, and against the grain. For the one thing that God wants to do with men is to bring their wills into entire harmony with His. And we cannot have that done without much treatment which will inflict in love beneficent pain.

Of course, the correction, which is spoken of in my text, is not that which befalls a man by reason of the difficulties or sorrows of outward life. The Apostle is speaking of the chastisement which the love of God that has appeared brings with it. That is to say, in all true contact with Jesus Christ there will be an element of correction that teaches us our evil, and that thwarts many of our inclinations. No man can live beside that Lord without being rebuked moment by moment, and put to wholesome shame day by day, when he contrasts himself with that serene and radiant pattern and embodiment of all perfection. And no man can receive into his heart the powers of the world to come, the might of an indwelling Spirit, without that Spirit exercising as its first function that which Christ Himself told us it would perform. "When the Comforter is come He will convict of sin," and it is never a pleasant thing to be taught how bad we are. The eye-salve, dropped into the eye, may help to bring clear vision, and to take away disease in time, but its



first effect is smarting agony. We must be willing to accept that if we want to be cleansed and made pure.

So, dear brethren, since there is no growth in holiness without pain and self-denial and discipline, and since there is no blessedness without growth in holiness, let us open our hearts for the chastisements, the rebukes, the bitter-sweet of Christ's presence within us, and of His Spirit's work. And let us be thankful if our hearts tingle beneath the rod and we sometimes feel the pain of necessary self-denial and mutilation. Surely it is better to be separated from our sins than to be parted from our God. Surely it is better to be joined to the Lord, and one spirit with Him, than to be tied, as men were in the horrid punishments of old, to a rotting corpse, our own evil self, and to breathe its poison and die. Horses in a stable on fire will not let themselves be led out, and so they are burned. "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding." Let God, with gentle, though it may sometimes be with painful, violence, draw you away from that which is drawing you away from Him. Do not say, "I had rather die than have the right hand, that is so dear, cut off." "It is better for thee to enter into life maimed than having two hands, to be cast into hell-fire." So let us pray, "Search me, O Lord, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me; and lead me in the life everlasting."





## VI

# The Purpose of the Discipline of Grace.

"THAT, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world."—  
TITUS ii. 12.



O appreciate the full force of these words, we must observe that they are the Apostle's statement of the ultimate design of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and of all the wonderful powers and gifts which Christ brought with Him. In our text, the end for which that grace has appeared and exercises its corrective discipline is defined. It comes "*in order that*, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly."

Now, remember that Paul thought that the life and the death of Jesus Christ were the most stupendous of miracles, nothing less than the entrance of Divinity in a human form into the limitations of our lives, and His participation in the darkness of our deaths. Remember that he believed that Jesus Christ's coming had led to a continual gift of an actual Divine life to men who trusted Him; then you will see the grandeur

and significance of the words of my text. What has this Divine miracle of mercy been for? Nothing but this, to help men here to-day to live good lives. If there were no future at all, says Paul, the expenditure of the Divine love is amply vindicated. The sun does not disdain to shine in order to ripen the vegetables in the humble cottage garden, and the love of God did not conceive that it had too small an object to warrant all that lavish gift which is in Christ, in helping us to live as becomes us. How dear we must be to God, and how infinitely important in His eyes must conduct and character be if such an abundance and variety of Divine influences were set in motion to produce such an effect! Now, the first thing that strikes me about these words is the fair picture that they draw of what every life should be; and then the hard conditions which they impose upon men that would live so; and then, what God has given us to make such lives possible. So I ask you to look at these three points.

I.—The fair picture of what our lives should be.

Paul is saying nothing more than conscience, reason, the instincts of men everywhere endorse. His requirements in the rough division of virtues which he adopts, not for scientific accuracy but for practical force, are really said "Amen!" to by every honest conscience. "Soberly, righteously, godly"—that is what everybody, if he will be fair with himself, feels to be the sort of life he ought to live. Let me just touch upon these three things very briefly. They may be said, roughly, though not very accurately perhaps, to cover the ground of a man's duties to himself, to his neighbours, and to God.

“Soberly”—that is what you owe to your own nature. “Righteously”—that is what you owe to people round you. “Godly”—that is what you owe to Him. I need not explain, I suppose, that the word “soberly” has by no means the narrow signification which the besetting vice of England has given to it now—viz., abstinence from, or a very restrained use of, intoxicating liquors, nor even the wider one of a curbing of the desires of sense. But the meaning may be better represented by *self-control* than by any other rendering. Now, if there were no men in the world but myself, and if I had no thought or knowledge of God, and if there were no other standard to which I ought to conform, I should have, in my own nature, with its crowd of desires, tastes, inclinations, and faculties, plain indication that self-government was essential. For human nature is not constituted on the plan of a democracy or an ochlocracy—a mob rule—but there is a clear hierarchy and order of predominance in it; and, as plainly as a ship is made to need a rudder, so plainly on your make is there stamped the necessity for rigid self-control.

For we all carry with us desires, inclinations, appetites—some of them directly connected with our physical frame, and some of them a little more refined—which are mere blind inclinations to a given specific good, and will be stirred up, apart altogether from the question of whether it is expedient or right to gratify them. To a hungry man the odour of food is equally enticing, whether the food belongs to himself or his neighbour; and if he had to steal for it, it would still tempt him. Because, then, we are to a large extent made up of blind desires which take no

account of anything except their appropriate food, the commandment comes from the deepest recesses of each nature, as well as from the great Throne in the heavens—"Live soberly." The engines will work on all the same, though the bows of the ship be turned to the rocks, and driving straight on the reef. It is the engineer's business to start them and keep them going; it is their business to turn the screw; it is somebody else's business to look after the navigation. We have our "humours under lock and key" in order that we may control them. And if we do not, we shall go all to rack and ruin. So, "live soberly," says Paul.

The next requirement is, "righteously." Now, I said that that might, perhaps, be roughly explained as referring mainly to our duties to one another. But that is not by any means an exhaustive—and, perhaps, a scarcely approximate—description. For the attitude expressed in "righteously" does not so much refer to other people as to the existence of a certain standard, external to ourselves, to which it is our business and wisdom to conform. I said that, if there were nothing in the world except a man and his own nature, the duty of sober self-government would necessarily arise. But the supposed isolation does not exist. We stand in certain relations to a whole universe of things and of people, and there does rise before every man, however it may be accounted for, or explained away, or tampered with, or neglected, a standard of right and wrong. And what Paul here means by "live righteously" is, "Do as you know you ought to do," and, in shaping your character, have reference not merely to its constitution,

but to its relations to all this universe of outside facts.

So far as the word may include our duty to others, I may just remind you that "righteousness" in reference to our fellows demands mercy. The common antithesis which is drawn between a just man who will give everybody what they deserve, and not one scrap more nor less if he can help it, and a kindly man is erroneous, because every man has a claim upon every other man for lenient judgment and undeserved help. He may not deserve it, being such a man as he is; but he has a right to it, being a man at all. And no man is righteous who is not merciful. We do not fulfil the prophet's exhortation, "do justice," unless we fulfil his other, "love mercy." For mercy is the right of all men.

The last of the phase under which the perfect life is represented here takes us up at once into another region. If there were nobody but myself in the world, it must be my duty to live controlling myself; since I stand in relations manifold to creatures manifold, and to the whole order of things, it is my duty to conform to the standard, and to do what is right. And just as plainly as the obligations to sobriety and righteousness press on every man, so plainly is godliness necessary to his perfection. For I am not only bound by ties which knit me to my fellows, or to this visible order, but the closest of all bonds, the most real of all relations, is that which binds us each to God.

And if "man's chief end be to glorify God," and then, and thus, "to enjoy Him for ever," then that end, in its very nature, must be all pervasive, and

diffuse its sweetness into the other two. For you cannot sliver up the unity of life into little sections and say, "This deed has to be done soberly, and that one righteously, and this one godly," but godliness must cover the whole life, and be the power of self-control and of righteousness. "All in all or not at all." Godliness must be uniform and universal. Lacking their supreme beauty are the lives of all who endeavour to keep these other two departments of duty and forget this third. There are many men—I have no doubt there are some of them here to-night—punctiliously trying to control their natures, and to live righteously; but all their thoughts run along the low levels, and they are absolutely blind and deaf to voices and sights from heaven. They are like some of those truncated pyramids, broad-based upon the solid earth, and springing with firm lines to a certain height, and then coming to a dead stop, and so being but stumps, which leave a sense of incompleteness, because all the firm lines have not gathered themselves up into the sky-piercing point which aspires still higher than it has reached. "Soberly," that is much; "righteously," that is more; "godly," that is, not *most*, but *all*.

II.—Secondly, notice what a hard task the man has who will live so.

The Apostle, very remarkably, puts first, in my text, a negative clause. The things that he says we are to deny are the exact opposites of the characteristics that he says we are to aim after. "Denying ungodliness"—that is clearly the opposite of "godly"; and "worldly lusts," though perhaps not so obviously, yet certainly is the antithesis of "soberly" and



"righteously." I need not remind you, I suppose, that the word "lusts" here has not the carnal associations cleaving to it which have gradually accrued to it in the changes of language since our translation was made, but that it implies simply "desires," longings, of however refined and incorporeal a sort, which attach themselves to the fleeting things of this life. Pride, ambition, and all the more refined and less sensual desires are as much included as the grossest animalism in which any swine of a man can wallow. Worldly lusts are desires which say to earth, and to what earth can give, in any of its forms, "Thou art my god, and having thee I am satisfied."

Now, says Paul, there is no good to be done in the matter of acquiring these positive graces, without which a life is contemptible and poor, unless, side by side with the continual effort at the acquisition of the one, there be the continual and resolute effort at the excision and casting out of the other. Why? Because they are in possession. A man cannot be godly unless he casts out the ungodliness that cleaves to his nature; nor can he rule himself and seek after righteousness unless he ejects the desires that are in possession of his heart. You have to get rid of the bad tenant if you would bring in the good one. You have to *turn* the current, which *is* running in the wrong direction. And so it comes to be a very hard, painful thing for a man to acquire these graces of which my text speaks. People talk as if what was needed was the cultivation of what we have. Aye! that is needed; but there is something else than that needed. You have to turn out a great deal of bad in order to make room for the good. Not that the evil can be



expelled without the entrance of the good, as I shall have to say in a moment. But still the two things must go on side by side.

And so it is hard work for a man to grow better. If it were only advancing in practice, or knowledge, or sentiment, or feeling, that would not be so difficult to do; but you have to reverse the action of the machine; and that is hard. Can it be done? Who is to keep the keepers? It is difficult for the same self to be sacrifice and priest. It is a hard matter for a man to crucify himself, and we may well say, if there can be no progress in goodness without this violent and thorough mutilation and massacre of the evil that *is* in us, alas! for us all. I am sure, as sure as I stand here, that there are plenty of young men and women in this chapel this evening who have tried once and again, and have failed once and again, to "live soberly, righteously, and godly"; because the evil that is in them has been too strong for them.

III.—I come, lastly, on the strength of that grand first word of my text, "in order that" to remind you of what God gives us to make such life possible.

"The grace of God, that bringeth salvation to all men, hath appeared disciplining us," for this purpose, that "the things which are impossible with men are possible with God." Christ and His love; Christ and His life; Christ and His death; Christ and His Spirit; in these are new hopes, motives, powers, which avail to do the thing that no man can do. An infant's finger cannot reverse the motion of some great engine. But the hand that made it can touch some little tap or lever, and the mighty masses of polished iron begin to move the other way. And so God, and God only,

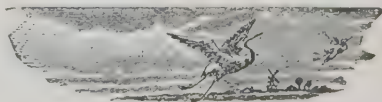
can make it possible for us to deny ourselves ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to "live soberly, righteously, godly, in this present world." He, that Jesus who comes to us to mould our hearts into hitherto unfelt love, by reason of His own great love, and who gives to us His own Spirit to be the life of our lives, gives us by these gifts new motives, new powers, new tastes, new affections. He puts the reins into our hands, and enables us to control and master our unruly tempers and inclinations. If you want to clear out a tube of any sort, the way to do it is to insert some solid substance, and push, and that drives out the clogging matter. Christ's love coming into the heart expels the evil, just as the sap rising in the trees pushes off the old leaves that have hung there withered all the winter. As Luther used to say, "You cannot clean out the stable with barrows and shovels. Turn the Elbe into it." Let that great flood of life pour into our hearts, and it will not be hard to "live soberly."

He comes to help us to live "righteously." He gives us His own life to dwell in our hearts, in no mere metaphor, but in simple fact. And they that trust in Jesus Christ are righteous by no mere fiction of a righteousness reckoned, but by the blessed reality of a righteousness imparted.

He comes to make it possible for us to live "godly." For He, and He alone, has the secret of drawing hearts to God; because He, and He alone, has opened the secret of God's heart to us. As long as we think of that Father in the heavens as demanding and commanding, we shall not love Him, nor serve Him, nor live "godly." "I knew thee that thou wast an

austere man . . . therefore I was afraid, and hid my talent in the earth." But when we learn that "God" and "Love" spell with the same letters, and that He gives us in Christ the power to be what He commands us, then our spirits are stirred into thankful obedience.

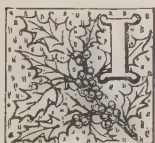
So, dear friends, you that have been, as I am sure many of you have been, trying over and over again to mend yourselves, and have failed, listen to this gospel. You that have been sitting at the foot of the mountain, and seeing the shining towers of the fair palace-temple on its summit, and have made two or three feeble and foiled efforts to reach it, and then have rolled back again, do not despair or fancy that the heights are inaccessible. Trust yourselves to Christ, and let His life come into your spirits, and He will "make your feet as hind's feet, to tread upon the high places." He will be the Path, and will show the path, and will give His angels charge concerning thee, to bear thee up in their hands, and to carry thee at last thither, whither He desires to bring thee. "Say not in thy heart, Who shall ascend up into the heavens? The word is nigh thee." Trust thyself to that Son of Man who came down from heaven, and was in heaven when He came, and He will become the ladder, with its foot on the earth, by which even your feeble steps may rise to God.



## VII.

### The Blessed Hope.\*

“LOOKING for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”—TITUS ii. 13.



SHOULD be doing equal violence to your feelings and to my own deep affection if my first words this morning were not the expression of our share in the sorrow of all good men for the death of Mr. Spurgeon. The loss falls especially on the churches of the denomination to which he and I belong; but it touches Christendom. He was as good as he was great; he was as sweet as he was good. His genius for forceful, racy speech sets him by the side of the great masters of our English tongue. His fervour of devotion and intensity of love to the Lord Jesus Christ blazed through all his work. He was absolutely self-forgetful, thinking nothing of himself and everything of his message. His pathos and his humour, his sagacity and his kindness, were equal. His power of cheery work was unexampled, and all that he was he gave to his Lord, with rare and beautiful simplicity and faithfulness. He had no

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\* Preached on the Sunday after Mr. Spurgeon's death.

peer; he can have no successor. Such lives are not given twice to a generation. We shall honour him best if we try to fill our little places as he did his, and to cleave to the Master whom he magnified and now beholds.

My text this morning does not come inappropriately in such circumstances. It brings us into touch with the realities into which our brother has entered, and it points us the path by which we may travel to the same rest.

I.—I note in it, first, the great object of the Christian hope, “the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”

Now I suppose I need not explain that the true rendering of the words before us is *not* “the glorious appearing,” but “*the appearing of the glory.*” There is a distinct reference to the previous words which we have considered in former sermons. There are two appearings, that of “the grace of God and that of the glory.” *Grace*, as I explained on a previous occasion, is condescending, gentle, forgiving, stooping, restoring love which comes to us embodied and manifested in the life and death of Jesus Christ. The “glory” was originally that supernatural brightness, the symbol of the Divine presence, which shone between the cherubim, and then, in a wider sense, is used to mean the blinding lustre of the self-manifestation of God. The distinction between the two words is beautifully given when, instead of compliance with the presumptuous prayer, “I beseech Thee show me Thy glory,” the answer was, “I will make all My goodness pass before thee.”

There is, then, a double manifestation of the Divine character in its twofold aspects of grace and glory—

one in the past, on which all our trust is fixed; one in the future, to which all our hope should be directed. A great revolving light turns now the side which gives white beams, and now that which flashes forth fiery red. The grace which is manifested is not the whole of the Divine character, which men here or hereafter shall be capable of beholding and experiencing, but following and based upon that appearance of the grace shall be the appearance of the glory.

These two manifestations are paralleled in many respects, as is shown by the very fact that the same word is employed in reference to both; but they differ substantially in this, the aspect of the Divine character manifested by each. The one is like the silver moon flooding all things with silvery and gentle light; the other is like the flash of the lightning from one side of the heavens to the other.

Both the manifestation of the grace and that of the glory are given through the same medium. Jesus Christ is the means of making the grace visible; and Jesus Christ will be the means of making the glory visible. That parallelism seems to make the rendering of the words in our Authorized Version preferable to that which has sometimes been suggested, and to make it more probable that we should read "the glory of the great God and our Saviour," than "the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ." There is no theological objection to the latter rendering, nor is there any grammatical objection to the possibility of it; but the congruity of the context seems rather to require that in both cases the Manifester should be Christ, and the Manifested should be God.



I said in a former sermon that the "appearing of the grace" could mean nothing else than the making visible to men in human form, by one entering into the limits of time and place, of the invisible love of God. "The appearance of the glory" must likewise be a making visible by a corporeal local personal coming of Christ in His perfected manhood back again to this old earth. "That same Jesus who has gone from you into heaven shall come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven." As truly as He wore our manhood and walked the fields of Palestine for our redemption in the manifestation of the Father's love, so truly shall He come again, in visible, corporeal manhood, to manifest to the world the glory of God.

And these two appearances are connected in such a manner that the former is evidently incomplete without the latter. As certainly as the cradle at Bethlehem required the open grave and the ascension from Olivet, so certainly does the ascension from Olivet require the return to judgment. If the Lord of the servants hath gone from them to receive the Kingdom, needs must be that He shall return. The world has not done with Jesus Christ yet, and it cannot be that that calm disappearance is the last of His relations to it. He *has* come, therefore He *will* come. The past has in it one great fact, to which the world must turn for light, for leading, for life. And that past fact, like an Eastern sky that flings its colouring into the furthest west, irradiates the future and points onwards to His return again. So that past fact and its companion yet to be are like two great towers on opposite sides of some fathomless abyss, from which stretch the



slender rods which are sufficient to bear the firm structure on which we may tread across the gulf, defiant of the darkness, and find our way into the presence of God.

II.—Secondly, notice the Christian anticipation of the appearing.

“Looking,” says the Apostle, “for that blessed hope.” How comes he to call it blessed? If it be a flashing forth of the Divine glory, and if it be, as it distinctly is, a coming to judge the earth, there must be much about it which will touch into activity not unreasonable fears, and may make the boldest and truest shrink and ask themselves the old question, “Who shall stand when He appeareth?” But Paul here stretches out the hands of his faith and the yearnings of his desire to it. He sees a great distant Star, hasting towards the earth through the abysses of space, and he longs for its impact upon the world: which might seem to mean ruin. Whence comes this confidence?

It comes from the power of love. How beautiful it is, how merciful, and how strange that the very same yearning after bodily presence, the same restlessness in separation, and the same fulness of satisfaction in companionship, which mark the lower loves of earth, can be transferred wholly to that higher love! If our hearts are wed to Him, we shall know that to be “present with the Lord” is far better than the best beside; and that His coming must be for loving hearts “as the morning spread upon the mountains.” The hope is blessed when the heart loves Him who is to come.

It is blessed because of the power of the assurance

which we all may have that that coming can bring no harm to us. "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness before Him at the day of Judgment." It is blessed because the Manhood which is thus lifted to participate in and to be the medium of manifesting to a world the Divine glory is our Manhood; and we shall share in the glory that we behold, if here we have trusted in the grace that He revealed. "He shall change the body of our humiliation that it may be fashioned after the likeness of the body of His glory." And when Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall we be manifested with Him *in* glory. So, because of the power of love, because of the power of confidence that no harm can come from the beloved presence, and because of the well-founded assurance that His glory is shared with all His brethren, according to His own prayer, that the glory which He had with the Father may be in these His disciples, we can look forward, if we are cleaving to Him with however humble and tremulous faith, and say, "Yes! we, too, feel that His coming is a hope, and is blessed." We can then understand and join in the rapturous triumph of the psalmists of old when they call upon earth and sea and trees and hills to rejoice before the "Lord, for He cometh to judge the world."

And the hope is blessed because, in contradistinction to all earthly objects of hope, it is certain—certain as history, certain as memory. It is as secure as treasures that we keep in the cedar-presses of our remembrances. It is also blessed because, being thus certain, it is far enough in advance never to be outgrown, never to be fulfilled and done with here. So it outlasts all others, and may be laid in a dying

hand, like a rosebud clasped in cold palms, crossed on each other, in the coffin ; for not until we have passed the veil shall we receive the hope. He will come to the world ; you and I will go to Him ; either way, we shall be ever with the Lord. And that is a hope that will outlast life and death.

Then, consider how large a space in the Christian life this hope ought to fill. It is, as my text shows us, as much a part of Christian duty to cultivate it as it is to "live soberly, righteously, and godly." Nay, more, if we regard the structure of the sentence, of which my text is a member, and observe that the latter is in form identical with the previous clause, "*denying* ungodliness and worldly lusts," it may seem as if, just as the former, "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts," was the means by which the "sober, righteous, and godly life" should be maintained ; so that life is not to be reached except through the cherishing of this bright hope. That is true, for where shall we find stronger bridles for our passions and lusts than in that thought, "The Lord cometh" ? "Let your moderation be known unto all men : the Lord is at hand." And where shall we find stronger inducements to live soberly, righteously, and godly than in the thought that He comes to judge the world, and us with it ?

But alas ! there is a wonderful difference between the extent, imperfect as even it is, in which average Christian people try to fulfil that threefold ideal of life, "sober, righteous, and godly," and the extent to which they recognize it as a clear duty, to cultivate the brightness of this Christian hope. A thousand pities is it that there are so few of us who live under

the light of it, except the good men who have given themselves to the study of the *time* when it shall come to be fulfilled; and have largely, by fancies that were shattered generation after generation, discredited the very doctrine which they love. But, dear brethren, sure am I that there can be no failure in the vigour and continuity of our hope of the coming of the Lord Jesus, without a corresponding feebleness setting in throughout the whole Christian life. It is for us to see to it that day by day we live in the anticipation which will lift us above cares and sorrows, and will interpret for us many things which otherwise would be insoluble problems—the blessed anticipation that He will come and manifest Himself in the glory of His Father, and that we, even we, may share therein.

III.—Lastly, note the teaching or correction which strengthens the hope.

You will remember that in former sermons we have seen that the appearing of the grace of God has a function of disciplining or correction, in order that we should live “soberly, righteously, and godly.” The forward looking in the text is part of the purpose of the appearance of the grace. The great means by which this Christian hope may be cherished in its brightness and its fulness is the yielding to the schooling, the correction and discipline, which the past and present manifestation of the grace of God brings with it.

The fact that the first manifestation is of an educational and corrective kind is in itself an evidence that there is another one to follow. For the very idea of training implies that there is something

for which we are being trained ; and the very word "correction" or "discipline" involves the thought of an end towards which the process is directed. That end can be no less than the future perfecting of its subjects in that better world. Life is unintelligible, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ is more unintelligible still, unless all be meant to prepare men for the life beyond the grave. It is impossible that all these costly gifts and powers which make up God's revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ shall have been set agoing for purposes which terminate with this life. It is as impossible that all the sedulous care which is exercised over each of us by the tutors and governors that we find in the Gospel of Jesus Christ shall have no object in view except such as is reached in the imperfect attainments of the Christian life here. God does not take the rough bar of iron and turn it into steel and polish it and shape it and sharpen it to so fine an edge in order that He may then break it and cast it "as rubbish to the void." You will find in prehistoric tombs broken swords and blunted spears which were laid there with the corpses ; but God does not so break His weapons, nor is death the end of our activity. If there be discipline, there is something for which the discipline is meant. If there be an apprenticeship, there is somewhere work for the journeyman to do when he has served his articles and is out of his time. There will be a field in which we shall use the powers that we have acquired here ; and nothing can bereave us of the force we made our own, being here. Grace disciplines ; therefore there is glory.

Again, our yielding to the grace is the best way of

strengthening our hope of the glory. The more we keep ourselves under the influences of that mighty salvation that is in Jesus Christ, and let them chasten and correct us, and submit our inflamed eyes to their healing pains, the more clearly will they be able to see the land that is afar off. "I counsel thee to buy of Me eye-salve that thou mayest see." Telescope glasses are polished in order that they may enable the astronomer to pierce the depths of the heavens. Diamonds depend for their brightness on the way in which they are cut, and it is poor economy to leave some of the precious stone on the mass, if thereby its reflecting power and its radiance be diminished. God cuts deep and rubs hard, in order that He may brighten the surface and the depth of our souls, that they may receive in all its purity the celestial ray, and flash it back in varied colours. So, if we would live in the buoyant hope of the manifestation of the glory, let us docilely, prayerfully, penitently, patiently, submit ourselves to the discipline of the grace.



## VIII.

### Christ's Gift to us and ours to Him.

"WHO gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."—TITUS ii. 14.



WE have already seen, in sermons on the previous part of this paragraph, that the Apostle is here regarding the Gospel predominantly under its ethical aspect, and that he states, as the great purpose for which the saving grace of God has appeared, the disciplining of us for sober, righteous, and godly living. Here, at the close of this section, he reiterates the same idea yet more tenderly and more emphatically, for he specifies that great and infinite gift of Jesus Christ, with all its mysteries of unfathomable self-sacrifice and love, and conceives that this mighty bestowment was given for the sole and simple purpose of making us love righteousness and hate iniquity and do good. Mighty agencies are not set in operation for small ends; to make good men was an adequate object for the sacrifice and self-surrender of Jesus Christ.

We have in this text mainly two great thoughts: the conception of Christ's work and the conception of



its purpose. And perhaps we shall best appreciate the fulness of meaning in the words before us if we simply take them as they stand.

I.—Note, first, the unspeakable and all-powerful gift. “He gave Himself for us.”

Now, that is more than a mere beautiful hyperbole for a life of beneficent devotion to the welfare of humanity. Such a thought as that is a great deal too shadowy to have rested on it the weight of the moral reformation and spiritual quickening of mankind. There must be something more meant than the beneficence of the most enthusiastic philanthropist; something more than the self-sacrifice of the martyrs for mankind. For there have been many such in the past; but the most pure, lofty, and fervent of them has not been able to kindle any widespread conflagration of righteous zeal amidst the dead greenwood of humanity. The fire which is to transform and transfigure the selfishness of men into eagerness for good works and self-surrendering devotion must be brought from another altar than any to which these have access.

I take it that in that great word, “He gave Himself,” there lies a great deal more than such sacrifices as those which other benefactors have made for mankind. I take it that the beginning of Christ’s giving of Himself to the world lay farther back in time than the cradle of Bethlehem; for to Him it was condescension to be born; and His bestowment of Himself upon the world began “when He left the Father and came into the world.” He began to give Himself when, from the depths of eternity, He passed within the limitations of men, and, drawn by our need, and

impelled by filial obedience and fraternal love, entered within the conditions of our existence, "and, forasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, Himself likewise took part of the same." It was much that Christ should stretch out His hand to bless, should "give His back to the smiter, and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair," and bear His cross on His own shoulders, and should be fastened to it on Calvary. Did you ever think that it was, perhaps, more that He should *have* a hand with which to bless, and a back to be bared to the scourge, a cheek that did not flush with one angry spot when rude spittings were shot upon it, and traitorous kisses touched it, shoulders to bear His cross, and a body to be nailed upon it? Why had He these but because, ere He had them, He gave Himself for us? And so, having its roots in eternity, that gift included all His wonderful, self-oblivious, and world-blessing life, and culminated in the death upon the cross. Not that He only gave Himself to the world when He "gave Himself up to the death for us all," but that therein were most eminently expressed, and there were most mightily concentrated, the powers that redeemed and the love that sacrificed itself. Unless this be our conception of Christ's gift—a willing incarnation, a willing endurance of the woes and pains of humanity, and a willing death for the world—I know nothing that there is in Him, or in it, either to evoke or to deserve the reverence and the obedience of the world.

But then, mark, still further, that the Apostle here gives us another thought which deepens the wonderfulness and the preciousness of this gift; for, speaking

to a man who had never come near Jesus Christ in the flesh, and including in his words the whole race of mankind to the last syllable of recorded time, he declares that "He gave Himself for *us*." How did He give Himself for us unless in the giving He had the knowledge of us and His heart turned to us; unless when He yielded Himself to life, and to death, the thoughts of all the men in the world, and that should thereafter be in it, were the motives that impelled Him? And how did "He give Himself for us" unless He gave Himself for me and for thee? The individualizing character of Christ's purpose of mercy in His death is taught us throughout Scripture, and His yielding of Himself for us is only intelligible when we understand that the *us* for which He died was made up of all the single *me's* that had been, or that should be. So you and I and all our fellows can take such great words as these of my text and point their generality till it blessedly pierces our own hearts, translating the universal benevolence into the individual affection, and saying, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me."

One more word before I pass from this first thought of my text—and it is this. The language here, strictly understood, simply declares that Jesus Christ, in His whole life, and eminently in His death, was doing something for our benefit. It does not literally and accurately declare in what way that benefit was to accrue. There are plenty of places in the New Testament in which we read that Jesus Christ suffered in life and in death the consequences of man's transgression, Himself being sinless. There are plenty of places in which the "for us" means "instead of

us." It does not grammatically mean that here. The Apostle is not defining the method in which Christ's death was beneficial to humanity; but I want to ask this question, which I have asked, I daresay, from this place many a time before, and which seems to me to admit of but one answer—in what way was Christ's death for me unless it was instead of me? I venture to say that it is of little more use than the lives and deaths of a hundred named and unnamed saints and heroes and benefactors, unless that be so.

Why is it, for instance, that the magic pen of a Plato leaves us cold when we read of the death of a Socrates, except for a moment's admiration; and why is it that our hearts thrill when we read the inartificial records that fishermen and peasants have left us of Calvary? I know of but one reason why Christ's life and death are a transforming power in the world. And the reason is, "the Lord hath made to meet on Him the iniquity of us all." "He gave Himself for us" most chiefly in this, that "He bare our sins and carried our sorrows" "in His own body on the tree"; and that therefore "by His stripes we are healed." Christ's sacrifice for sin is the superlative manifestation of His giving Himself for us.

II.—Secondly, notice the redeeming power of the gift thus conceived.

Now, you will remember that the metaphor contained in the word "redemption" is that of delivering a slave from bondage by paying a ransom. Probably it alludes to the emancipation of Israel from Egypt. In this context, that from which we are said to be redeemed is iniquity or lawlessness; and that what is meant is emancipation from the power and practice of

sin is obvious from the next clause, in which "purify" expresses the same thing positively as "redeem" does negatively. It is noteworthy that here, in the Apostle's summing up of the great purpose of the life and death of Jesus Christ, he isolates from all other consequences of that mighty fact, blessed as those are, and selects as the sole object to be considered, this power to deliver men from the bondage of evil.

Now, of course, Paul would have been the last man to say that the work of Jesus Christ did not avert from men the so-called penal consequences of sin. He would have been the last man to deny that the work of Jesus Christ had for its ultimate object the elevation of men to the full possession of the Divine likeness, and the walking in the light of the Divine countenance amidst the glories of heaven. But neither forgiveness nor acceptance, nor the blessings of the inward spiritual life here on earth, nor the glories and felicities of that life beyond the grave, so much as come into his view here. This is what Christ died for—not that you may escape the consequences of your evil-doing; not only that you may be forgiven; not that you may have the blessedness of the consciousness of the Divine favour, and all those sweet and sacred secrets of fellowship with Him which make so much of a good man's life; nor even that you may pass into heaven and its glories when, wearied with earth, you unregrettingly leave it; but that you may be good people down here, toiling and moiling amidst all the troubles and temptations of your daily life. That is what Jesus Christ died for—not only that He might redeem you from the penalties of sin, nor from its guilt, but that He might

redeem you from doing it. "Little children, let no man deceive you. He that doeth righteousness is righteous." And whilst one cannot say too much, or speak too thankfully, too hopefully, too joyfully of these other great purposes for which Christ died, let us remember that here all these are put into the shade, and one only is selected as the adequate purpose which warrants and repays even the expenditure of that love which "gave Himself for us."

There is nothing except the gift of God in Jesus Christ which is powerful enough to break the bondage of sin under which we are held. You want more than culture, more than the morality of prudence, more than education of conscience, in order to weaken passion and to strengthen will, so that a man may shake off the bondage of the evil which he has done, and may begin to walk in newness of life. I know of no power that enables a poor man, beset and burdened by torturing tyrants of his own passions, and feeble against the strong seductions of outward temptation, to stand fast and overcome them all, shaking their fetters from his emancipated limbs, but the realization of that infinite sacrifice, that changeless Divine human love, that mighty pure Brother's life, from which there flow into men's hearts motives and powers and impulses which, and which alone, are strong enough to make them free. "He that committeth sin is the slave of sin"; and if the Son shall make us free, we shall be free indeed. This conception of Christ's work alone, as it seems to me, carries volume and substance enough to sweep out of our hearts our evil inclinations. This, and this alone, as it seems to me, brings into humanity impulses, motives, powers,



which will free us from the dominion of the lusts and sins that have bound us. He comes as His angel did to the man sleeping in his chains, with the quaternion of rude soldiers watching over his slumbers, lest their prey should escape, and separated from liberty by iron doors and thick walls. He lays His hand upon the sleeper, and at His word "Arise!" the chains fall off the fettered limbs; and the argus-eyed guardians are sunk in charmed slumber; and the captive passes them unharmed and unhindered, and through the iron gate that openeth of its own accord, and stands wondering at his liberty, but feeling in every thrilling vein that he is free at last. Christ is the Emancipator, and His gift of Himself, construed as Paul construed it, is the power that sets us free.

III.—Note, still further, the answering gift that corresponds to, and is evoked by, Christ's gift of Himself.

The Apostle still is thinking in the terms of the ancient Jewish history; and just as in the redemption from iniquity there is an allusion to the deliverance of the people from Egyptian bondage, so in the other clause which speaks about our Lord's redeeming and purifying unto Himself a people for His own possession, there is an allusion to the standing of Israel of old, which, by its deliverance from Egypt, was, in a special sense, made to be God's own particular possession. Thus Jesus Christ "gave Himself for us," says Paul—with beautiful lingering emphasis on the reduplicated "Himself"—"gave Himself for us, that He might win us for Himself." The only way by which we can win another for ourselves is by giving ourselves to that other. Hearts are only bought by



hearts; love's flame can only be kindled by love's flame. The only way by which one spiritual being can possess another is when the possessed loves and yields to the love of the possessor. And thus Jesus Christ makes us His own by giving Himself to us for our own. Brethren! there is no power known in humanity that can, I was going to say, decentralize a human life and lift it clean off its pivot of self except the power of the unspeakable love of Jesus Christ on the Cross. We revolve round our own centres, self is our centre; but that great Sun of Righteousness has mass enough to draw hearts and lives from their little orbit, and to turn them into satellites of its own. And then they move in music and in light around the Sun of their souls. If you want to know the blessedness of loving self, yield to the love of Him who forgot Himself for you and gave Himself for you. Nothing else will conquer that miserable demon of self-regard that cracks his whip and rattles his chains in all our hearts. But Christ is Conqueror, because Christ is the infinite Lover. He gave Himself that He might buy us for Himself. Therefore, to live for myself is death, is blasphemy, is ingratitude; and the only fitting response to Him who thus yielded all for us is that we should come and say, "We are not our own, we are bought with a price."

IV.—Lastly, and only a word, notice here the enthusiasm for good which that great gift will kindle. "Zealous of good works." Now do not let us run off with the idea that "good works" means giving away money, and visiting amongst poor people, and all these other conventional things that have usurped the name. These are good, no doubt; at least they

will be if the motive be right ; but the Apostle's notion is a much wider and broader one than that. He means substantially the same thing as he and the other New Testament writers mean by "righteousness"—the deeds of all kinds which correspond to men's place and power—"whatsoever things are lovely and of good report."

Paul thinks that if a man has rightly pondered and yielded himself to the influence of that serene and supreme example of a beautiful works, Christ's giving of Himself for us, he will not only do such works, but be passionately desirous of opportunities for doing them.

Ah ! That goes pretty deep, does it not ? It is not enough that a man shall do the good works, as so many professing Christians do, feeling all the while that it is rather a burden to have to do them, and that inclinations go the other way. But we must be passionate enthusiasts for goodness, must seek for opportunities for it, or, as Christ put it, "hunger and thirst after righteousness." It is a deal easier to be zealous for the church, for a society, for a political or religious party or school, for a movement or a cause than to be "zealous for good works." And all that zeal is froth unless the other be with it. All Christ's flock are earmarked thus. They are zealous for good. They like and they seek for good works. That is the Owner's brand ; they are known to be the people of His possession, because they are so marked.

Now, you Christian men and women, go away home and ask yourselves, "Is that me, and have I that likeness ?" And do you all of you take this for a last word—you will never love righteousness and hate

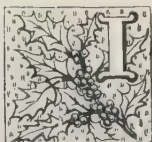
iniquity, you will never belong to Jesus Christ, you will never be "zealous of good works," or take a pleasure in nobility and purity of life and character, until you have submitted life and character to the transforming power of the wonderful fact that Jesus Christ gave Himself for you; and, on the other hand, you have no right to say that you are a Christian unless, through faith in that sacrifice, you not only are sure of forgiveness, but conscious that Jesus Christ has broken the chains of your sins, and made you free for and in His happy service. "O Lord, truly I am Thy servant. Thou hast loosed my bonds."



## IX.

### Melted by Kindness.

“AND when Jesus came to the place, He looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zaccheus, make haste and come down ; for to-day I must abide at thy house.”—LUKE xix. 5.



It is characteristic of Luke that only he tells the story of Zaccheus. He always dwells with special interest on incidents bringing out the character of Christ as the Friend of outcasts. His is eminently the Gospel of forgiveness. For example, we owe to him the three supreme parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the Prodigal Son, as well as those of the Pharisee and the publican praying in the Temple ; and of the Good Samaritan. It is he that tells us that all the publicans and sinners came near to Jesus to hear Him ; and he loses no opportunity of enforcing the lesson with which this incident closes, “The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” It is because of the light that it throws upon that great thought that he tells this fascinating story of Zaccheus. I need not repeat it. We all remember it, and the quaintness and grotesqueness of part of it fix it in people’s memories. We know how the rich taxgatherer,

pocketing his dignity, and unable to see over the heads of the crowd, scrambled up into the branches of the sycamore tree that overhung the road; and there was found by the eye of love, and surprised by the words of kindness, which melted him down, and made a new man of him on the spot. The story seems to me to be full of teaching, to which I desire to turn your attention this evening.

I.—First, note the outcast, drawn by imperfect motives to Jesus Christ.

It has been supposed that this man was a Gentile, but his Jewish name establishes his origin. And, if so, the fact that he was a publican *and* a Jew says a good deal about his character. There are some trades which condemn, to a certain extent, the men who engage in them. You would not expect to find a man of sensitive honour acting as a professional spy; or one of earnest religious character keeping a public-house. You would not expect to find a very good Jew condescending to be the tool of the Roman Government. Zaccheus was at the head of the revenue office in Jericho, a position of considerable importance, inasmuch as there was a large volume of trade through that city from its situation near the fords of the Jordan, and from the fertility of the plain in which it stood. He had made some money, and probably made it by very questionable means. He was the object, not undeservedly, of the execration and suspicion of his countrymen. Italians did not love Italians that took service under Austria. Irishmen did not love Irishmen that in the bad old days used to collect church cess. And so Jews had no very kind feeling towards Jews who became Cæsar's

servants. That a man should be in such a position indicated that he cared more for money than for patriotism, religion, or popular approval. His motto was the motto of that Roman Emperor who said, "Money has no smell," out of whatever cesspool it may have been fished up. But the consciousness of being encompassed by universal hatred would induce the object of it to put on an extra turn of the screw, and avenge upon individuals the general hostility. So we may take it for granted that Zaccheus, the head of the Jericho custom-house, and rich to boot, was by no means a desirable character.

What made him want to see Jesus Christ? He said to himself, curiosity; but probably he was doing himself injustice, and there was something else working below than merely the wish to see what sort of man was this Rabbi Joshua from Galilee that everybody was talking about. Had he heard that Jesus had a soft place in His heart for his class? Or was he, perhaps, beginning to get tired of being the butt of universal hatred, and finding that money scarcely compensated for that? Or was there some reaching out towards some undefined good, and a dissatisfaction with a very defined present, though unnamed, evil? Probably so. Like some of us, he put the trivial motive uppermost because he was half ashamed of the half-conscious better one.

I wonder if there are any here now who said to themselves that they would come out of curiosity to hear the preacher, or from some such ordinary motive, and who all the while have, lying deep below that, another reason altogether, a dim feeling



that it is not all right between them and God, and that here may be the place to have it put right? At all events, from whatsoever imperfect motives little Zaccheus was perched up in the sycamore there, he went to see Christ, and he got more than he went for. Unconsciously we may be drawn, and imperfect motives may lead us to a perfect Saviour.

He sets us an example in another way. Do not be too punctilious about dignity in pursuing aims that you know to be good. It would be a sight to bring jeers and grins on the faces of the crowd to see the rich man of the custom-house sitting up amongst the leaves. But he did not mind about that if he got a good look at the Rabbi when He passed. People care nothing for ridicule if their hearts are set upon a thing. I wish there were more of us who did not mind being laughed at if only what we did helped us to see Jesus Christ. Do not be afraid of ridicule. It is not a test of truth ; in nine cases out of ten it is the grimace of fools.

II.—Then, further, notice the self-invited Guest.

When the little procession stopped under the sycamore tree, Zaccheus would begin to feel uncomfortable. He may have had experience in past times of the way in which the great doctors of orthodoxy were in the habit of treating a publican, and may have begun to be afraid that this new one was going to be like all the rest, and elicit some kind of mob demonstration against him. The crowd would be waiting with intense curiosity to see what would pass between the Rabbi and the revenue collector. They would all be very much astonished. "Zaccheus! make haste and come down. To-day I must abide at thy house."

Perhaps it was the first time since he had been a child at his mother's knee that he had heard his name pronounced in tones of kindness. There was not a ragged beggar in Jericho who would not have thought himself degraded by putting his foot across the threshold that Jesus now says He will cross.

It is the only time in which we read that Jesus volunteered to go into any house. He never offers to go where He is not wanted, any more than He stays away where He is. And so the very fact of His saying "I will abide at thy house" is to me an indication that, deep down below Zaccheus' superficial and vulgar curiosity, there was something far more noble which our Lord fosters into life and consciousness by this offer.

Many large truths are suggested by it on which we may touch. We have in Christ's words an illustration of His individualizing knowledge. "Zaccheus, come down." There is no sign that anybody had told Christ the name, or that He knew anything about Zaccheus before by human knowledge. But the same eye that saw Nathanael under the fig-tree saw Zaccheus in the sycamore; and, seeing in secret, knew without being told the names of both. Christ does not name men in vain. He generally, when He uses an individual's name in addressing him, means either to assert His knowledge of his character, or His authority over him, or in some way or other to bespeak personal adhesion and to promise personal affection. So He named some of His disciples, weaving a bond that unites each single soul to Himself by the act. This individualizing knowledge and drawing love and authority are all expressed, as I think, in that one

word "Zaccheus." And these are as true about us as about him. The promises of the New Testament, the words of Jesus Christ, the great, broad, universal "who-soevers" of His assurance and of His commandments are as directly meant for each of us as if they were in an envelope with our names upon them and put into our hands. We, too, are spoken to by Him by our names, and for us, too, there may be a personal bond of answering love that knits us individually to the Master, as there certainly is a bond of personal regard, compassion, affection, and purpose of salvation in His heart in regard of each single soul of all the masses of humanity. I should have done something if I should have been able to gather into a point, that blessedly pierced some heart to let the life in, the broad truths of the Gospel. "Whosoever will, let him come." Say to yourself, "That is me." "Whosoever cometh I will in no wise cast out." Say to yourself, "That is me." And in like manner with all the general declarations, and especially with that chiefest of them all, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish." Read it as you may—and you will never read it right until you do—"God so loved *me*"—John, Mary, or whatever be your name—"Jesus so loved *me* that if *I* believe upon Him *I* shall not perish, but have everlasting life."

Then, note, further, how here we get the revelation, in a concrete form, of Christ's perfect willingness and desire to make common cause, and dwell with the most degraded and outcast. I have said this is the only instance in which He volunteered to be a guest. Pharisees asked Him, and He did not refuse. The

publican's dwelling, which was tabooed, He opened the door of by His own hand. And that is what He always does.

This little incident may be taken to be, not merely a symbol of His whole dealings, but an illustration, in small, of the same principle which has its largest embodiment and illustration in the fact of His Incarnation and Manhood. Why did Jesus Christ take flesh and dwell among us? Because He desired to seek and to save that which is lost. Why did He go into the publican's house, and brave the sneers of the crowd, and associate Himself with the polluted? For the same reason. Microscopic crystals and gigantic ones are due to the same forces working in the same fashion. This incident is more than a symbol; it is a little instance of the operation of the law which finds its supreme and transcendent instance in the fact that the eternal Son of God bowed the heavens and came down "and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory."

His example is our pattern. A Christian church which does not imitate its Master in its frank and continual willingness to associate itself with the degraded and the outcast has lost one of the truest signs of its being vitalized with the life of Christ. There is much in this day in the condition of Christian communities to make men dissatisfied and fearful. But there is one thing which, though in all its developments one cannot sympathize with it, is in its essence wholly good, and that is the new and quickened consciousness that a church which does not address itself to the outcasts has no business to live; and that Christian people who are too proud of their

righteousness to go amongst the unclean and the degraded are a great deal more of Pharisees than Christians, and have need to learn which be the first principles of the religion which they profess. Self-righteousness gathers up its skirts in holy horror; perfect righteousness goes cheerily and without fear amongst the outcasts, for where should the physician go but to the sick, and where should Christ be found but in the house of the publican?

Further, the saying of our Lord suggests His recognition of the great law that ruled His life. Chronology here is of much importance. We do not generally remember that the scene with Zaccheus was within about a week of the Crucifixion. Our Lord was on that last journey to Jerusalem to die, during the whole of which there was over His demeanour a tension of holy impatience, altogether unlike His usual manner, which astonished and amazed the disciples as they followed Him. He set His face like a flint to go to Jerusalem; and strode before them on the way as if He were eager to reach the culmination of His sufferings and of His work. Thus borne on the wings of the strong desire to be perfected on the Cross, He is arrested on His path. Nothing else was able to stop Him, but "to-day I *must* abide in thy house." There was a soul to be saved; and the world's sacrifice had to wait till the single soul was secured. Christ hurrying, if I may use the word, at all events steadfastly and without wavering, pressing towards the Cross, let His course be stopped by this need. The highest "must" was obedience to the Father's will, and parallel with that need there was the other, of rescuing the Father's prodigal sons. So this

elder Brother owned the obligation, and paused on the road to Calvary, to lodge in the house of Zaccheus. Let us learn the sweet lesson, and take the large consolations that lie in such a thought.

Again, the utterance of this self-invited Guest suggests His over-abundant fulfilment of timid, half-conscious desires. I said at the beginning of my remarks that only curiosity was on the surface; but that the very fact that our Lord addressed Himself to the man seemed to imply that He desiered in him something more than mere vulgar curiosity. And the glad leap with which Zaccheus came down from his tree might have revealed to Zaccheus himself, as no doubt it did to some of the bystanders, what it was that he had been dimly wishing. So with us all there are needs, longings, half-emerging wishes, that have scarcely come into the field of consciousness, but yet have power enough to modify our actions. Jesus Christ understands all about us, and reads us better than we do ourselves; and is ready to meet, and by meeting to bring into full relief, these vague feelings after an undefined good. Brethren, He is to us, if we will let Him be, all that we want; and He is to us all that we need, although we only half know that we need it, and never say to ourselves that we wish it.

There is a last thought deducible from these words of our Lord's; and that is, His leaving a man to decide whether he will have Him or no. "Make haste and come down, for to-day I *must* abide at thy house." Yes! but if Zaccheus had stuck in his tree, Christ's "must" would not have been fulfilled. He would have gone on to Jerusalem if the publican had not scrambled down in haste. He forces Himself on



no man; He withholds Himself from no man. He respects that awful prerogative of being the architects of our own evil and our own good, by our own free and unconstrained choice.

Did you ever think that it was now or never with the publican; that Jesus Christ was never to go through the streets of Jericho any more; that it was Zaccheus' last chance; and that, if he had not made haste, he would have lost Christ for ever? And so it is yet. There may be some in this place this evening to whom Jesus Christ is now making His last appeal. I know not; no man knows. A rabbi said, when they asked him when a man should repent, "Repent on the last day of your lives." And they said, "But we do not know when that will be." And he said, "Then repent *now*." So I say, because some of you may never hear Christ's Gospel again, and because none of us know whether we shall or not; make sure work of it *now*, and do not let Jesus Christ go out of the city and up the road between the hills yonder; for if once the folds of the ravine shut Him from sight He will never be back in Jericho, or seen by Zaccheus any more for ever.

III.—And so, lastly, notice the outcast melted by kindness.

We do not know at what stage in our Lord's intercourse with the publican he "stood and said, Half of my goods I give to the poor," and so on. But whensoever it was, it was the sign of the entire revolution that had been wrought upon him by the touch of that loving hand, and by the new fountain of sympathy and love that he had found in Jesus Christ.

Some people have supposed, indeed, that his words

do not mark a vow for the future, but express his practice in the past. But it seems to me to be altogether incongruous that Zaccheus should advertise his past good in order to make himself out to be not quite so bad as people thought him, and, therefore, not so unworthy of being Christ's host. Christ's love kindles sense of our sin, not complacent recounting of our goodness. So Zaccheus said, "Lord! Thou hast loved me, and I wonder. I yield, and fling away my black past; and, so far as I can, make restitution for it."

The one transforming agency is the love of Christ received into the heart. I do not suppose that Zaccheus knew as much about Jesus Christ after the conversation as we do; nor did he see His love in that supreme death on the Cross as we do. But the love of the Lord made a deep dint in his heart, and revolutionized his whole nature. The thing that will alter the whole current and set of a man's affections, that will upset his estimate of the relative value of material and spiritual, and that will turn him inside out and upside down, and make a new man of him, is the revelation of the supreme love that in Jesus Christ has come into the world, with an individualizing regard to each of us, and has died on the Cross for the salvation of us all. Nothing else will do it. People had frowned on Zaccheus, and it made him bitter. They had execrated and persecuted him; and his only response was setting his teeth more firmly and turning the screw a little tighter when he had the chance. You can drive a man into devilry by contempt. If you want to melt him into goodness, try love. The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, but Jesus Christ can change his heart, and that will

change his skin by degrees. The one transforming power is faith in the love of Jesus Christ.

Further, the one test of a true reception of Him is the abandonment of past evil and restitution as far as possible. People say that our Gospel is unreal and sentimental, and a number of other ugly adjectives. Well! If it ever is so, it is the fault of the speakers, and not of the Gospel. For its demands from every man that accepts it are intensely practical, and nothing short of a complete turning of his back upon his old self, shown in the conclusive forsaking of former evil, however profitable or pleasant, and reparation for harm done to men, meets them.

It is useless to talk about loving Jesus Christ and trusting Him, and having the sweet assurance of forgiveness, and a glorious hope of heaven, unless these have made you break off your bad habits of whatsoever sort they may be, and cast them behind your backs. Strong emotion, sweet deep feeling, assured confidence in the sense of forgiveness and the hope of heaven, are all very well. Let us see your faith by your works; and of these works the chief is—behold the evil that I did, I do it no more: “Behold! Lord! the half of my goods I give to the poor.” There was a young ruler, a chapter before this, who could not make up his mind to part with wealth in order to follow Christ. This man has so completely made up his mind to follow Christ that he does not need to be bidden to give up his worldly goods. The half given to the poor, and fourfold restoration to those whom he had wronged, would not leave much. How astonished Zaccheus would have been if anybody had said to him that morning,

“Zaccheus! before this night falls you will be next door to a pauper, and you will be a happier man than you are now.”

So, dear friends, like Him, all of us may, if we will, and if we need, make a sudden right-about-face that shall alter the complexion of our whole future. People tell us that sudden conversions are suspicious. So they may be in certain cases. But the moment when a man makes up his mind to change the direction in which his face is set will always be a moment, however long may be the hesitation, and the meditation, and the preparation that led up to it.

Jesus Christ is standing before each of us as truly as He did before that publican, and is saying to us as truly as He said to him, “Let Me in!” “Behold! I stand at the door and knock. If any man open . . . I will enter.” If He comes in He will teach you what needs to be turned out if He is to stop; and will make the sacrifice blessed and not painful; and you will be a happier and a richer man with Christ and nothing than with all beside and no Christ.



## Where and with whom Faith lives.

"YE are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven."—HEB. xii. 22, 23.



THE magnificent passage of which these words are part sums up the contrast between Judaism and Christianity which this whole Epistle has been illustrating and enforcing. The writer takes the scene on Sinai as expressive of the genius of the former Revelation, whose centre was a law which evoked the consciousness of sin, and kindled terror; and which was embodied in sensible and material symbols. Far other and better are the characteristics of the latter Revelation. That excites no dread; is given from no flashing mountain, with accompaniments of darkness and trumpet blasts and terrible words; and it brings us into contact with no mere material and therefore perishable symbols, but with realities none the less real because they are above sense, and not remote from us though they be.

For, says my text, "*Ye are come*," not "*Ye shall come*." The humblest life may be in touch with the grandest realities in the universe, and need not wait

for death to draw aside the separating curtain in order to be in the presence of God and in the heavenly Jerusalem.

How are these things brought to us? By the revelation of God in Christ. How are we brought to them? By faith in that revelation. So every believing life, howsoever encompassed by flesh and sense, can thrust, as it were, a hand through the veil, and grasp the realities beyond.

The scene described in the first words of my text may verily be the platform on which our lives are lived, howsoever in outward form they may be passed on this low earth; and the companions, which the second part of our text discloses, may verily be our companions, though we "wander lonely as a cloud," or seem to be surrounded by far less noble society. By faith we are come to the unseen realities which are come to us by the revelation of God in Christ. "*Ye are come unto Mount Zion.*"

Now, looking generally at these words, they give us just two things—the scene and the companions of the Christian life. The remainder of the passage will occupy us on future occasions, but for the present I confine myself to the words which I have read. And I shall best deal with them, I think, if I simply follow that division into which they naturally fall, and ask you to note, first, where faith lives, and, second, with whom faith lives.

I.—First, then, where faith lives.

"Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." There are two points here which carry us back to the topography of the ancient sacred city. In the literal



Jerusalem, Zion was the lofty Acropolis, at once fortress and site of the king's palace, and round it clustered the dwellings of the city.

The two symbols are thus closely connected, and present substantially the same idea. And perhaps it is pressing a figure too far to find a diversity of meaning in the separate parts of this closely-connected whole. But still it seems to me that there is a substantial difference of aspect in the two clauses.

The first thought, therefore, that I would suggest to you is this, that the life of a man who has truly laid hold of Jesus Christ, and so is living by faith, is on its inward side—that is, in deepest reality—a life passed in the dwelling of the great King. All through this letter the writer is recurring to the thought of access to God, unimpeded and continual, as being the great gift which Jesus Christ has brought to us. And here he gathers it into the noblest symbol. There, lifted high above all the humbler roofs, flash the golden pinnacles of the great palace in which God Himself dwells. And we, toiling and moiling down here, surrounded by squalid circumstances, and annoyed by many cares, and limited by many narrownesses which we often find to be painful, and fighting with many sorrows, and seeming to ourselves to be, sometimes, homeless wanderers in a wilderness, may yet evermore “dwell in the house of the Lord, to behold His beauty and to enquire in His temple.”

The privilege has for its other side a duty; the duty has for its foundation a privilege. For if it be true that the real life of every believing soul is a life that never moves from the temple-palace where God is, and that its inmost secret and the spring of its

vitality is communion with God, what shall we say of the sort of lives that most of us most often live? Is there any truth in such exalted metaphors as this in reference to us? Does it not sound far liker irony than truth to say of people whose days are so shuttle-cocked about by trifling cares, and absorbed in fleeting objects, and wasted in the chase after perishable delights, that they "are come unto Mount Zion," and dwell in the presence of God? Is my "life hid with Christ in God"? There is no possibility of Death being your usher, to introduce you into the house of God not made with hands, unless Faith has introduced you into it even whilst you tarry here, and your habitual direction of heart and mind towards Him keeps you evermore at least a waiter at His threshold, if you do not pass beyond. "I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord than dwell in the tents of wickedness."

My brother, do we so knit ourselves to Him, by heartfelt acceptance of the good news of His loving proximity to us which Jesus Christ brings, as that indeed we have left earth and care and sin at the foot of the mount, with the asses and the servants, and have our faces set to the lofty sweetnesses of our "Father's house"? "Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house," and no less blessed are they "in whose hearts are the ways" that lead to it.

Then let me remind you how Zion contrasts with Sinai, and thus suggests the thought that a true Christian life, based upon faith, has a communion with God which is darkened by no dread, nor disturbed by a consciousness of unforgiven sin. We have set against each other the terrors of that theophany on

Mount Sinai, attendant on or rather precedent to the giving of the law—the mountain wrapped in smoke; in the heart of the wreathing blackness the flashing fire; from out of the midst of it the long-drawn trumpet blasts, the proclamation of the coming of the King; and then the voice which, Divine as it was, froze the marrow of the hearers' bones, that they entreated that no words like these should any more fall on their trembling ears.

That is the one picture. The other shows us the mount where the King dwells, serene and peaceful the clouds far below the horizon; the flashing fire changed into lambent light; the blast of the trumpet stilled; the dread voice changed into a voice "that speaketh better things" than were heard amidst the granite cliffs of the wilderness.

And so in vivid, picturesque form the writer gathers up the one great contrast between the Revelation of which the message was law and its highest result the consciousness of sin and the shrinking that ensued, and the other of which the inmost heart is Love, and the issue the attraction of hearts by the magnetism of its grace. The old fable of a mountain of loadstone which drew ships at sea to its cliffs is true of this Mount Zion, which is exalted above the mountains that it may draw hearts tossing on the restless sea of life to the "fair havens" beneath its sheltering height. There is no dread, though there is reverence, and no fear, though there is awe, in the approach of those who come through Jesus Christ, and live beneath the smile of their reconciled God and Father. "Ye are come unto Mount Zion," the dwelling-place of the living God, from whose lips

there will steal into the ears and the hearts of those who keep near Him gracious words of consolation, so thrilling, so soothing, so enlightening, so searching, so encouraging, that they which hear them shall say "Speak yet again, that I may be blessed."

And then there is the other aspect of this scene where faith lives. "Ye are come unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." I need not remind you of how much we hear in this Epistle in reference to that city. It is generally set forth as being yet to come, as being the object of seeking rather than of possession. But the fact is that there are two aspects of it. In one it is future, in the other it is present. The general idea to be attached to it is simply that of the order and social state of those who love and serve God. Here, in this part of my text, we have to deal with the city rather than with its inhabitants. They follow thereafter, but, so far as we can separate between the two, we have just this idea enforced in the words that I am now commenting upon—viz., that the lowliest life, knit, as it seems to be, by so many bonds to the perishable associations and affinities of earth, yet, if it be a life of faith in Jesus Christ, has its true affinities and relationships beyond, and not here. "We have our citizenship in heaven," says the Apostle, "from whence also we look for the Saviour." And every Christian man and woman is therefore bound to two or three very plain duties.

If you are living by faith, you do not belong to this order in the midst of which you find yourself. See that you keep vivid the consciousness that you do not. Cultivate the sense of detachment from the

present, of not being absorbed by, or belonging to, things which are not coeval with yourself, and from all of which you will have to pass. Cultivate the sense of having your true home beyond the seas; and look to it as emigrants and colonists in a far-off land do to the old country, as being *home*. Live by the laws of your own city, and not by those that run in the community in which you dwell. You are under another jurisdiction. The examples, the maxims of low earthly prudence, or even of a somewhat higher earthly morality, are not your laws. You are not bound to do as the people round about you do. "I appeal unto Cæsar." I take my orders from him. I send my despatches home, and report to headquarters, and if I get approbation thence, it does not matter what the people amongst whom I dwell think about me. Make your investments at home. The Jews invented banking and letters of credit in order that they might the more easily shift their wealth from one land to another as exigencies required. We are strangers where we are. Do not put your property into the country in which you live as an alien, and lock it up there; but remit, as you can do, to the land where you are going, and to which you belong. Home securities are a good deal better than foreign ones. "Ye are come to the city of the living God." "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth."

II.—And now let me turn to the other thought here: with whom does faith live?

I need not trouble you with merely expository remarks upon the diversity of arrangement which is possible in the second half of my text. Suffice it to say that just as the scene of the life of faith has been

represented in a twofold and yet closely connected form as Mount Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem, so the companions of that life are also represented in a twofold and yet closely connected form.

A slight alteration in the punctuation and order of the words in our text brings out, as it seems to me, the writer's idea. Suppose you put a comma after "innumerable company," and substitute for that phrase the original Greek word, so reading "and to *myriads*," and then pause there. That is the general definition, on which follows the division of the "myriads" into two parts; one of which is "the general assembly of angels," and the other is the "church of the first-born which are written in heaven." So then, of companions for us, in our lonely earthly life, there be two sorts, and as to both of them the condition of recognizing and enjoying their society is the same — viz., the exercise of faith.

Now, the word rendered "general assembly" has a grander idea in it than that. It is the technical word employed in classic Greek for the festal meetings of a nation at their great games or other solemn occasions, and always carries in it the idea of joy as well as of society. And so here the writer would have us think of one part of that great city, the heavenly Jerusalem, as, if I may so say, the dwelling-place of a loftier race of creatures whose life is immortal and pure joy; and that we, even we, have some connection with them. In an earlier part of this letter we read that they are all "ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them that shall be heirs of salvation." But here the ministration is not referred to, simply the fact of union and communion.



I am not going to enter at any length upon that subject, concerning which we know but very little. But still it seems to me that our ordinary type of Christian belief loses a great deal because it gives so little heed to the numerous teachings of the New Testament in regard to the reality of the existence of such beings, and of the tie that unites them with lowly believers here. All the servants of the King are friends of one another. And howsoever many they may be, and howsoever high above us in present stature any may tower, and howsoever impossible it be for us to see the glancing and hear the winnowing of their silver wings, as they flash upon errands of obedience to Him, and rejoice to hearken to the voice of His word, there is joy in the true belief that the else waste places of the universe are filled with those who, in their loftiness, rejoice to bend to us, saying, "I am thy fellow servant, and of them which worship God."

Brethren, we have a better face brightening the unseen than any angel face. But just because Jesus Christ fills the unseen for us, in Him we are united to all those of whom He is the Lord, and He is Lord of men as well as angels. So if the eyes of our hearts are opened, we, too, may see "the mountain full of chariots of fire and horses of fire round about" the believing soul. And we, too, may come to the joyful assembly of the angels, whose joy is all the more poignant and deep when they, the elder brethren, see the prodigals return.

But the second group of companions is probably the more important for us. "Ye are come," says the text, not only to the angelic beings that cluster round

His throne in joyful harmony, but also "to the Church of the first-born, which are written in heaven." And, seeing that the names are in heaven, that means, evidently, men who themselves are here upon earth.

I have not time to dwell upon the great ideas which are here contained in the designation of the community of believing souls; I only remind you that probably the word "church" is not so much employed here in its distinct ecclesiastical sense (for there are no ecclesiastical phrases in the Epistle to the Hebrews), as with allusion to the assembly of the Israelites beneath Mount Sinai, the contrast with which colours the whole of the context. It means, therefore, in general, simply the assembly of the firstborn. Can there be more than one firstborn in a family? Yes! In this family there can, for it is a name here not pointing to a temporary order, but to dignity and prerogative. The firstborn had the right of inheritance; the firstborn was sanctified to the Lord; the firstborn, by his primogeniture, was destined in the old system to be priest and king. All Israel collectively was regarded as the firstborn of the Lord. We, if our hearts are knit to Him who is pre-eminently firstborn amongst many brethren, obtain, by virtue of our union with Him, the rights and privileges, the obligations and responsibilities, of the eldest sons of the family of God. We inherit; we ought to be sanctified. It is for us, as the "first fruits of His creatures," to bring other men to Him, that through the Church the world may reach its goal, and creation may become that which God intended it to be.

These firstborn have their names written in Heaven—inscribed on the register of the great city. And to that great community, invisible like the other realities in my text, and not conterminous with any visible society such as the existing visible Church, all those belong and come who are knit together by faith in the one Lord.

So, dear friends, it is for us to realize, in the midst, perhaps, of loneliness, the tie that knits us to every heart that finds in Jesus Christ what we do. In times when we seem to stand in a minority; in times when we are tormented by uncongenial surroundings; when we are tempted by lower society; when we are disposed to say, "I am alone, with none to lean upon," it does us good to think that, not only are there angels in heaven who may have charge concerning us but that, all over the world, there are scattered brethren whose existence is a comfort, though we never clasped their hands.

Such, then, is the scene, and such is the society, in which we may all dwell. Christian men and women, do you make conscience of realizing all this by faith, by contemplation, by direct endeavours to pierce beyond the surface and shows of things to the realities that are unseen? See to it that you avail yourself of all the power, the peace, the blessing which will be yours in the degree in which your faith makes these the home and companions of your lives.

How noble the lowest life may become, like some poor, rough sea-shell with a gnarled and dimly-coloured exterior, tossed about in the surge of a stormy sea, or anchored to a rock, but when opened all iridescent with rainbow sheen within, and bearing a

pearl of great price! So, to outward seeming, my life may be rough and solitary, and inconspicuous and sad, but, in inner reality, it may have come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, and have angels for its guardians, and all the firstborn for its brethren and companions.



## XI.

### Faith's Access to the Judge and His Attendants.

"YE are come . . . to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,"—HEB. xii. 23.



THE principle of arrangement in this grand section of this letter is obscure, and I am afraid that I cannot cast much, if any, light upon it. We might, at first sight, have expected that the two clauses of our present text should have been inverted, so as to bring all the constituent parts of "the city of the living God" closely together—viz., "the angels," the members of the militant Church on earth, and those of the triumphant Church in Heaven; and also to bring together "God the Judge of all," and "Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant." But the arrangement as it stands in our text, may be compared profitably with that of the preceding verses, which we were considering in the last sermon. There, as here, the allusion to the immediate presence of God passed at once into the reference to the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. And just as there Zion, the palace, was immediately connected with the city of the living God, so here the writer, harking back, as it were, to

his original starting-point, no sooner names "God the Judge" than he passes on to set before us "the spirits of just men made perfect." In the earlier clauses we have had the more general reference to the palace and the city around it. Here, if I may so say, we pass within the palace gates, and the writer tells us what we find there. This interweaving of the presence of God with that of the creatures that live in His love witnesses to the great truth that our God dwells in no isolated supremacy, but in the midst of a blessed society; and that the solitary souls that find their way into His presence have a welcome, not only from Him, but from all their brethren of His great family.

So the arrangement may not be so inexplicable, as, at first sight, it strikes us as being, if it suggests to us the close and indissoluble connection between God Himself and all those who, in every place, whether the place above or the place beneath, call upon the name of Him who is both their God and ours. In dealing with these words, I have simply to consider these two ideas thus set before us.

I.—Faith plants us at the very bar of God.

"Ye are come to God the Judge of all." Now, it is to be observed that, more accurately, the words might be rendered, "Ye are come to the God of all as Judge"; for the point which the writer wishes to bring out is not so much the general idea of the Divine presence, as that presence considered under a specific aspect, and referring to one mode of His action—viz., the judicial. It is further to be noticed that the judgment which is here spoken about is not, as the very language, "Ye *are* come to the Judge," implies, future, but present. The Old Testament, with



continual reference to which this letter is saturated, has a great deal more to say about the present continuous judgment which God works all through the ages than about the final future judgment. And, in accordance, not only with the language of our text, which makes *coming* a present thing, but, in accordance also with the whole tone of the Old Testament, we should recognize here, not so much a reference to the final tribunal before which all mankind must stand (at which the Judge is characteristically represented in the New Testament as being, not God the Father, but Jesus Christ), as to the continual judgment, both in the sense of decision as to character and infliction of consequences, which is being exercised *now* by the God of all.

So, then, the first thought that I would suggest from this idea is, Here is a truth which it is the office of faith to realize continually in our daily lives. Your loving access to God, Christian men and women, has brought you right under the eye of the Judge, and, though there be no terror in our approach to that tribunal, there ought to be a wholesome awe as the permanent attitude of our spirits, the awe which is the very opposite of the cowering dread which hath torment. He would be a bold criminal who would commit crimes in the very judgment hall and before the face of his judge. And that must be a very defective Christian faith which, like the so-called faith of many amongst us, goes through life and sins in entire oblivion of the fact that it stands in the very presence of the Judge of all the earth. Oh, if we could rend the veil as death will rend it, and see the things which are, as faith will help us to see them

—for it *thins*, if it does not tear, the envious curtain between—would it be possible that we should live the low, mean, selfish, earthly, sinful lives, devoured by anxieties, defaced by stains, depressed by trivial sorrows, which, alas! so many of us do live? “Ye are come . . . unto God the Judge of all.” “If ye call Him Father, who, without respect of persons, judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.”

Then, again, notice that this judgment of God is one which a Christian man should joyfully accept. “The Lord will judge His people,” says one of the psalms. “You only have I known of all the inhabitants of the earth: therefore will I punish you for your iniquities” says one of the prophets. Such sayings represent this present judgment as inevitable, just because of the close connection into which true faith brings a man with his Father in Heaven. Inevitable, and likewise most blessed and desirable, for in the thought are included all the methods by which, in providence, and by ministration of His truth and of His Spirit, God reveals to us our hidden meannesses; and delivers us sometimes, even by the consequences which accrue from them, from the burden and power of our sin.

So, then, the office of faith in regard of this continuous judgment which God is exercising upon us because He loves us is, first of all, to open our hearts to it by confession, by frank communion, by referring all our actions to Him to court that investigation. That judgment is no mere knowledge by cold Omniscience, such as a heathen conception of the Divine eye might make it to be; but just as a careful

gardener will go over his rose-trees, and the more carefully the more precious they are in his sight, to pick from each nestling-place at the junction of the leaves the tiny insects that are sucking out their sap, and destroying them, so God will search our hearts in order to pluck from these the crawling evils which, microscopic and tiny as they may be, will yet, in their multitude innumerable, be destructive of our spirits' lives.

It is a *gospel* when we say, "The Lord will judge His people." Therefore in many a psalm we have the writers spreading themselves out before God, and beseeching Him to come and search them, and try them, and sift them through His sieve, and know them altogether, in the sure confidence that where-soever He beholds an evil He will be ready to cure it, and that whosoever spreadeth out His sin before God will be lightened of the burden of his sin.

This merciful judgment, which is, in fact, all directed to the perfecting and sanctifying of its subjects, reaches its end in the measure in which we register its decisions in our consciences. God writes His mind about us on them, and when they speak they are only speaking an echo of the sentence that has been pronounced from that loftier tribunal. Therefore, whosoever professeth himself to be a Christian and does anything, be it great or small, which his conscience rebukes when done, and prohibited before it was done, that man is despising the judgment of God, and bringing down upon himself the condemnation which follows despised judgment. "If we should judge ourselves we should not be judged." Reverence your consciences: they are the

echo of the Judge's voice ; peruse their records : they are the register of the Judge's sentence ; and whensoever that inward voice speaks, bow before it and say, "Lord ! Thy servant heareth."

And then, further, remember that this judgment is one that demands our thankful acceptance of the discipline which it puts in force. If we knew ourselves we should bless God for our sorrows. These are His special means of drawing His children away from their evil. "When we are chastened, we are chastened of the Lord that we should not be condemned with the world." Oh ! there would be less impatience, less blank amazement when suffering comes to us, less vain and impotent regrets for vanished blessings, if we saw in all the dealings of our Father's hands the results of His judgment, and believed that it is better for us to be separated, though it be with violence and much bleeding of torn-away hearts, from our idols than that our idolatry should destroy us and mar them. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." This judgment is not only the merciful separation of us from our sins, but it is also a judgment on our behalf.

The office of the early Jewish judges was not only the judicial one which we mean by the word, but was much wider, and some trace of that idea runs through almost all the Old Testament references to the Divine judgment. It comes to mean, not merely a decision adverse or favourable, as the case may be, as to the moral character of its subjects, but it also substantially means pleading their cause, defending their right, intervening for them. And so in many a psalm you will find such petitions as this, "Judge me, O

Lord; for I am poor and needy. Plead my cause against them which rise up against me." And the same conception of the Judge's office appears in one of our Lord's parables, familiar to us all, in which we are told that "the Lord will judge His own elect, though He bear long with them."

Thus, another of the blessed thoughts that come out of this conception of our approach to "the Judge of all" is that we may confidently commit our cause to Him, and leave our vindication in His hands. So abstinent from self-assertion, from self-vindication, from vengeance or recompense, patience, courage, consolation, strength, all these virtues will be ours if we understand to whom we come by our faith, and can behold, on the throne of the universe, One who will plead our cause, and undertake for us whensoever we are burdened or oppressed.

II.—Secondly, Faith carries us while living to the society of the living dead.

"The Judge of all, and the spirits of just men made perfect." Immediately on the thought of God rising in the writer's mind, there rises also the blessed thought of the blessed company in the centre of whom He lives and reigns. We can say little about that subject, and perhaps the less we say the more we shall understand, and the more deeply we shall feel. We get glimpses but no clear vision, as when a flock of birds turn in their rapid flight, and for a moment the sun glances on their white wings; and then, with another turn, they drift away, spots of blackness in the blue. So we see but for a moment as the light falls, and then lose the momentary glory, but we may at least reverently note the exalted words here.

"The spirits of . . . men made perfect." That is to say, they dwell freed from the incubus and limitations, and absolved from the activities, of a bodily organization. We cannot understand such a condition. To us it may seem to mean passivity or almost unconsciousness, but we know, as another New Testament writer has told us, that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord; and that in some deep, and to us undiscoverable, fashion, that which the corporeal frame does for men here, immersed in the material world, there the encircling Christ in whom they rest does for them. We know little more, but we have a glimpse of a land of deep peace in which repose is not passivity nor unconsciousness, any more than service is weariness. And there we have to leave it, knowing only this, that it is possible for a man to exist and to be, in a relative sense, perfected without a body.

Then, further, these spirits are "perfect."

The writer has said, at the close of the preceding chapter, that the ancient saints "without us should not be made perfect." And here he employs the same word with distinct reference, as I suppose, to his previous declaration. From which I infer that that old thought is true, that Jesus Christ shot some rays of His victorious and all-reconciling power from His Cross into the regions of darkness, and brought thence those who were waiting for His coming through many a long age. A great painter has left on the walls of a little cell in his Florentine convent a picture of the victorious Christ, white-robed and banner-bearing, breaking down the iron gates that shut in the dark rocky cave; and flocking to Him, with outstretched



hands of eager welcome, the whole long series from the first man downwards, hastening to rejoice in His light, and to participate in His redemption.

So the ancient Church was "perfected" in Christ; but the words refer, not only to those Old Testament patriarchs and saints, but to all who, up to the time of the writer's composition of his letter, had "slept in Jesus." They have reached their goal in Him. The end for which they were created has been attained. They are in the summer of their powers, and full-grown adults, whilst we here, the maturest and the wisest, the strongest and the holiest, are but as babes in Christ.

But yet that "perfecting" does not exclude progress, continuous through all the ages; and especially it does not exclude one great step in advance which, as Scripture teaches us, will be taken when the resurrection of the body is granted. Corporeity is the perfecting of humanity. Body, soul, and spirit, these make the full-summed man in all his powers. And so the souls beneath the altar, clothed in white, and lapt in felicity, do yet wait for the adoption, even the redemption of the body.

Mark, further, that these spirits perfected would not have been perfected there unless they had been made just here. That is the first step, without which nothing in death has any tendency to ennoble or exalt men. If we are ever to come to the perfecting of the heavens, we must begin with the justifying that takes place on earth.

Let me point you to one other consideration, bearing not so much on the condition as on the place of these perfected spirits. It is very significant, as I tried to

point out, that they should be closely associated in our text with "God the Judge of all." Is there any hint there that men who have been redeemed, who, being unjust, have been made just, and have had experience of restoration and of the misery of departure, shall, in the ultimate order of things, stand nearer the Throne than unfallen spirits, and teach angels? It is the "just men made perfect," and not the festal assembly of the angels, that are brought into connection here with "the Judge of all." Is there any hint that in some sense these perfected spirits are assessors of God in His great judgment? "Ye shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel," seems to point in that direction. But the ground is precarious, and I only point to the words in passing as possibly affording a foothold for a "perhaps."

But the more important consideration is the real unity between poor souls here who are knit to Jesus Christ, and the spirits of the just made perfect who stand so close to the judgment seat.

Ah! brethren, we have to alter the meaning of the words "present" and "absent" when we come to speak of spiritual realities. The gross localized conceptions that are appropriate to material space, and to transitory time, have nothing to do with that higher region. It is no mere piece of rhetoric or sentiment to say that where our treasure is, there are our hearts, and where our hearts are there are we.

Love has no localities. It knits together two between whom oceans wide roll; it knits together saints on earth and saints in heaven. To talk of place is irrelevant in reference to such a union; for if our love, our aims, our hopes be the same, we are

together. And if they on the upper side, and we on the lower, grasp each the outstretched hand of the same God, then we are one in Him, and the same life will tingle through our earthly frames, and through their perfected spirits. He is the centre of the great wheel whose spokes are light and blessedness : and all that stand around Him are brought into unity by common relation to the centre.

Our sorrows would be less sorrowful, our loss less utter, if we truly believed that while apart we are still together. Our courage and our hope would rise if we came closer in loving contemplation and believing thought to the present blessedness of those once our fellow-travellers, who, weak as we, have entered into rest. Heaven itself would gain some touch of true attractiveness if we more clearly saw, and more thankfully felt, that there is "the Judge of all," and there also "the spirits of just men made perfect."

But howsoever great may be the encouragement, the consolation, the quieting that come from them, let us turn away our eyes from the surrounding and lower seats to fix them on the central throne. Let us ever realise that we are ever in our great Judge's eye. Let us spread out our hearts for His scrutiny and decision, for His discipline if need be. Let us commit to Him our cause, and, in the peace that comes therefrom, we may understand why it was that psalmists of old called upon earth to rejoice and the hills to be glad because He "cometh to judge the earth, to judge the world with righteousness, and the people with His truth."

## XII.

# The Messenger of the Covenant and its Seal.

“YE are come to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.”—HEB. xii. 24.



**I**N previous sermons on the preceding context we have had frequent occasion to remark on the parallel and contrast between Sinai and Zion, as expressive of the difference between the genius of Judaism and Christianity, which shapes the whole of this section. That contrast and parallel are most obvious at its beginning and here at its close.

In the beginning we had the mountain of the Law, swathed in darkness, lit by flashing flame, contrasted with the sunny slopes of Zion, palace-crowned, and the wild desert set in opposition to the city of peace that clustered round the foot of Zion's Mount. Here at the close we have the key-words of the old Revelation laid hold of and applied to the new. Judaism was a covenant in the form of a law, of which the terms were these: “Do, and thou shalt live!” The Gospel is a covenant in the form of a promise, of which the tenour is “Believe and live; live and do!” The ancient

covenant had Moses for its mediator, passing between the mountain and the plain. The Gospel has a better and a truer link of union between God and man than any mere man, however exalted, can be. The ancient system had its sprinkled blood, by which the men on whom it fell entered into the covenant, and were ceremonially sanctified. The new covenant has its blood. An awful voice rolled amongst the peaks of Sinai. That "blood of sprinkling" speaks too. And then the writer blends with that allusion another, to the voice of the blood of the first martyr, every drop of which cried to God for retribution, and points to the blood of the more innocent Abel, every drop of which appeals to the Father's heart for pardon.

Now it may be said that thus to present Christian truth under the guise of the symbols of an ancient ceremonial and external system is a retrograde step. And some people, who think themselves very enlightened, tell us that the time is past for looking at Christianity from such a point of view. One great man has let himself talk about "Hebrew old clothes." I am very much mistaken if these old clothes will not turn out to be something like the raiment that the Hebrews wore in the wilderness, "which waxed not old for forty years," and outlasted a great many suits that other people had cut for themselves. We have only to ponder upon these emblems until they become significant to us, in order to see that, instead of being antiquated and effete, they are throbbing with life, and fit as close to the needs of to-day as ever they did. They came with a special message, no doubt, to these men to whom this letter was first addressed, who were by descent and habit Hebrews, and saturated with the

law. But their message is to you and me quite as much; and I desire now simply to bring out the large and permanent meanings which lie beneath them.

I.—First, then, note that God's revelation to us is in the form of a covenant.

Now, of course, when we talk about a covenant or compact between two men, we mean a matter of bargaining on the terms of which both have been consulted, and which has assumed its final form after negotiations and perhaps compromise. But there are necessarily limitations to the transference of all human ideas to Divine relations. One such limitation is expressed in the very language of the original. The word rendered "covenant" suppresses the idea of conjunction, and emphasises that of appointment. By which we are to learn that the covenant which God makes with man is of His own settling and is not the result of mutual giving and taking; that men have nothing to do with the determining of these conditions; that He Himself has made them, and that He is bound by them, not because we have arranged them with Him, but because He has announced them to us. With that limitation we can take the idea and apply it to the relation between God and us, established in the great message of the Gospel.

For what is the notion that underlies the old-fashioned, and to some of you obsolete and unwelcome word? Why! simply this: it is a definite disclosure of God's purpose as affecting you and me, by which disclosure He is prepared to stand and to be bound. It is a revelation, but a revelation that obliges the Revealer to a certain course of conduct; or, if you



would rather have a less theological word, it is a system of promise under which God mercifully has willed that we should live. And just as when a king gives forth a proclamation, he is bound by the fact that he gave it forth, so God, out of all the infinite possibilities of His action, condescends to tell us what His line is to be, and He will adhere to it. He lets us see the works of the clock, if I may so say, not wholly, but in so far as we are affected by His action.

What, then, are the terms of this covenant? We have them drawn out, first, in the words of Jeremiah, who apprehended, when he was dwelling in the midst of that eternal system, that it could not be a final system; and next, by the writer of this letter quoting the prophet, who, in the midst of the vanishing of that which could be shaken, saw emerging, like the fairy form of the fabled goddess out of the sea-foam, the vast and permanent outlines of a nobler system. The promises of the Covenant are, then, full forgiveness as the foundation of all, and built upon that, knowledge of God inwardly illuminating and making a man independent of external helps, though he may sometimes be grateful for them; then a mutual possession which is based upon these, whereby I, even I, can venture to say, God is mine, and, more wonderful still, I, even I, can venture to believe that He bends down from heaven and says: "And thou, thou art Mine!" and then, as the result of all—named first, but coming last in the order of nature—the law of His commandment will be so written upon the heart that delight and duty are spelt with the same letters, and His will is our will. These are the elements, or you can gather them all up into one,

namely, the promise of eternal *life*—based upon forgiveness, operating through the knowledge of God, and issuing in perfect conformity to His blessed will.

If these, then, be the articles of the paction, think for a moment of the blessedness that lies hived in this ancient, and to some of us musty, thought of a covenant of God's. It gives a basis for knowledge. Unless He audibly and articulately and verifiably utters His mind and will, I know not where men are to go to get it. Without an actual revelation from heaven, of other nature, of clearer contents, of more solid certitude than the revelations that may have been written upon the tablets of our hearts, over which we have too often scrawled the devil's message, and over and above the ambiguous articles that may be picked out and pieced together, from reflection upon providence and nature, we need something better and firmer, more comprehensively and more manifestly authoritative, before we are entitled to say, "Behold! I *know* that God loves me, and that I may put my trust in Him." Brethren! I for my part believe that between agnosticism on that side, and the full evangelical faith of the New Testament in a supernatural revelation on this side, all forms of so-called Christianity which shy at the idea of a supernatural revelation are destined to have the life squeezed out of them, and that what will be left will be the two logical positions; first, God, if there be a God, never spoke, and we do not know anything about Him; and, second, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." If there be a God at

all, and if there be in Him any love and any righteousness, it is infinitely more reasonable to suppose that He should have spoken His mind and heart to men, and given them a covenant on which they can reckon, than that He has been from the beginning a dumb God, that never opened His mouth with a word of guidance or of sympathy for the sons of men. Believe that who may; I cannot believe in a pure theism, which has no place for a supernatural revelation.

And then, again, let me remind you how here is the one foothold, if I may so say, for confidence. If God hath not spoken there is nothing to reckon upon. There are perhapses, probabilities if you like, possibilities, but nothing beyond. And no man can build a faith on a peradventure. There must be solid ground on which to rest; and here is solid ground: "I make a covenant with you." "God is not a man that He should lie, nor the Son of Man that He should repent." And armed with that great thought that He has verily rent the darkness and spoken words which commit *Him* and assure *us*, we, even the weakest of us, may venture to go to Him, and plead with Him that He cannot and dare not alter the thing that has gone forth out of His mouth; and so, in deepest reverence, can approach Him and plead the necessity of a great *Must* under which He has placed Himself by His own word. God is faithful, the covenant-making and the covenant-keeping God.

II.—Secondly, mark that Jesus Christ is the Executor of this covenant.

Moses, of course, was a go-between, in a mere external sense—from the mountain to the plain and

from the plain to the mountain, he passed, and in either case simply carried a message bearing God's will to man or man's submission to God. But we have to dig far deeper into the idea than that of a mere outward messenger who carries what is entrusted to him, as an errand boy might, if we are to get the notion of Christ's relation with these great promises, which, massed together, are God's covenant with us. Observe that the emphasis is here laid on the manhood of the Lord. It is *Jesus* who is the "Mediator of the covenant"; and observe, too, that that idea passes into the wider notion of His place as the link uniting God and man. The depth of the thought is only reached when we recognize His divinity and His humanity. He is the ladder with its foot on earth and its top in heaven.

Because God dwells in Him, and the Word became flesh, He is able to lay His hand upon both, and to bring God to man and man to God.

He brings God to man. If what I have been saying is at all true, that for all solid faith we must have an articulate declaration of the Divine mind and heart, it seems to me to be equally irrefragable that for any such declaration of the Divine heart and mind we must have a human vehicle. God speaks through men. It is His highest way of making Himself known to men. And Jesus Christ in His Manhood declares God to us. Not by the mere words which He speaks, as a Teacher and a wise Man, a religious genius and a saint, a philosopher and a poet, a moralist and a judge; but by these, and also by His life, by His emotions of pity and gentleness and patience, and by everything that He does

and everything that He endures, He speaks to us of God.

Brethren, where shall a poor man rest his soul outside of the direct or indirect influences of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ? Why! the very men who reject Him to-day, on the plea that they have learnt a nobler conception of God than they can find in Christianity, owe their conception of Him to the Gospel which they reject. Where else is there certitude solid enough to resist the pressure of sorrow and of sin; confidence enough to maintain faith, in the face of difficulty and conscious evil and death; or energy enough in a creed to make religion an all-controlling influence and an all-gladdening stay except in Jesus Christ? I venture to say, nowhere! Nowhere beyond the limits to which either the river of the water of life has manifestly flowed; or some rills and rivulets from it have crept underground to give strange verdure to some far-off pasture. Nowhere else is there found the confidence in the Father's heart which is the property of the Christian man, and the result of the Christian Covenant. Jesus Christ brings God to man by the declaration of His nature incarnate in humanity.

And, on the other hand, He brings man to God; for He stands to each of us as our true Brother, and united to us by such close and real bonds as that all which He has been and done may be ours if we join ourselves to Him by faith. And He brings men to God, because in Him only do we find the drawings that incline wayward and wandering hearts to the Father. And He seals for us that great Covenant in His own person and work, in so far as what He in

Manhood has done has made it possible that such promises should be given to us. And, still further, He is the Mediator of the Covenant, in so far as He Himself possesses in His humanity all the blessings which Manhood is capable of deriving from the Father, and He has them all in order that He may give them all. There is the great Reservoir from which all men may fill their tiny cups.

Men tell us that they want no Mediator between them and God. Ah! my brother, go down into your own hearts; try to understand what sin is; and then go up as near as you can to the dazzling white light, and try partially to conceive of what God's holiness is, and tell us, Do you think you, as you are, could walk in that light and not be consumed? It seems to me that no man who has any deep knowledge of his own heart, and any, though it be inadequate, yet true, conception of the Divine nature, dare take upon his lips that boast that we often hear, "We need none to come between us and God."

For me, I thankfully hear Him say, "No man cometh to the Father but by Me"; and pray for grace to tread in that only way that leadeth unto God.

III.—Note the sprinkling of the blood which seals the Covenant.

There is an allusion there, as I have already suggested, to the ceremonial at Sinai, when, in token of their entrance into the Covenant, the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled upon the crowd; and also an allusion to the voice of the blood of the innocent Abel, which "cried to God from the ground." The writer has already referred to that in the earlier part of the letter; and here he weaves the two together



because, with whatever differences of representation, the substantial meaning of both images is the same. The blood shed establishes the covenant; and the blood sprinkled brings us into it.

If Jesus had not died, there would have been no promises for us, beginning in forgiveness and ending in wills delighting in God's law. It is "the new covenant in His blood." The death of Christ is ever present to the Divine mind and determines the Divine action.

Hence the allusion to the voice, in contrast both to the dread voice that echoed among the grim peaks of Sinai, and to that which, as if each drop had a tongue, called from Abel's innocent blood for retribution. Christ's, too, has a voice, and that an all-powerful one. It cries for pardon with the same authority of intercession as we hear in His wondrous high-priestly prayer: "Father, I will."

Further, that sprinkling, which introduced technically and formally these people into that covenant, represents for us the personal application to ourselves of the power of His death and of His life, by which we may make all God's promises our own, and be cleansed from all sin. It is "sprinkled." Then it is capable of division into indefinitely small portions, and of the closest contact with individuals. That is but a highly metaphorical way of saying that Jesus Christ has died for each of us, that each of us may find acceptance and cleansing, and the inheritance of all the promises, if we put our trust in Him.

For remember, these words of my text are the end of a great sentence, which begins, "Ye are come."

Faith is coming. What did Christ say? "He that

cometh unto Me shall hever hunger. He that believeth on Me shall never thirst." There is His own intrepertation of the metaphor. Whosoever trusts Him, comes to Him. If I put my tremulous faith on that dear Lord, though He be on the throne of the universe, and I down here, in this far-away dim corner of His creation, I am with Him where He is, and no film of distance need separate us. If we trust Him we come to Him. If we rest upon Him as our advocate and hope, then the loud voice of our sins will not be heard, accusing-tongued though they be, above the voice of His pleading blood.

And they who come to Christ, therein and thereby, come to all other glorious and precious persons and things in the universe. For, as I have already said, my text is the end of a long sentence, and is last named as being the foundation of all that precedes, and the condition of our finding ourselves in touch with all the other glories of which the writer has been speaking. He that comes to Christ is in the city. He that comes to Christ *is*—not *will be* in the palace. He that comes to Christ is in the presence of the Judge. He that comes to Christ touches angels and perfected spirits, and is knit to all that are knit to the same Lord. He that comes to Christ comes to cleansing, and enters into the fulness of the promise, and lives in the presence and companionship of his present-absent Lord. If we come to Jesus by faith, Jesus will come at last to us, to receive us to Himself; and join us to the choirs of the perfected spirits who "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

### XIII.

## Refusing God's Voice.

“SEE that ye refuse not Him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from Heaven.”—HEB. xii. 25.



THE writer has finished his great contrast of Judaism and Christianity as typified by the mounts Sinai and Zion. But the scene at the former still haunts his imagination and shapes this solemn warning. The multitude gathered there had shrunk from the Divine voice, and “entreated that it might not be spoken to them any more.” So may we do, standing before the better mount of a better Revelation. The parallel between the two congregations at the two mountains is still more obvious if we remark that the word translated in my text “refuse” is the same as has just been employed in a previous verse, describing the conduct of the Israelites, where it is rendered “entreated.” It may seem strange that after so joyous and triumphant an enumeration of the glorious persons and things with whom we are brought into contact by faith, there should come the jarring note of solemn warning which seems to bring back

the terrors of the ancient Law. But, alas ! the glories and blessedness into which faith introduces us are no guarantees against its decay ; and they who are " come unto Mount Zion and the city of the living God," may turn their backs upon all the splendour, and wander away into the gaunt desert.

I.—So we have here, first of all, the solemn possibility of refusal.

Now, to gain the whole force and solemnity of this exhortation, it is very needful to remember that it is addressed to professing Christians, who have in so far exercised real faith, as that, by it they *are* come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God." We are to keep that clear, or we lose the whole force and meaning of this exhortation before us, which is addressed distinctly, emphatically, and in its true application exclusively to Christian men—" See that *ye* refuse not Him that speaketh."

Then, again, it is to be noted that the refusal here spoken about, and against which we professing Christians are thus solemnly warned, is not necessarily entire intellectual rejection of the Gospel and its message. For the Israelites, who made the original " refusal," to which that which we are warned against is paralleled, recognised the voice that they would not listen to as being God's voice ; and just because it was His voice wanted to hear no more of it. And so, although we may permissibly extend the words before us to include more than is thereby originally meant, yet we must remember that the true and proper application of them is to the conduct of men who, recognising that God is speaking to them, do not want to hear anything more from Him. That is to say,

this warning brings to us Christians the reminder that it is possible for us so to tamper with what we know to be the uttered will and expressed commandment of God as that our conduct is tantamount to saying, "Be silent, O Lord ! and let me not hear Thee speak any more to me." The reason for that refusal, which thus, in its deepest criminality and darkest sin, can only be made by men that recognise the voice to be God's, lies just here, "they could not endure that which was commanded." So, then, the sum of the whole thing is this, that it is possible for Christian people so to cherish wills and purposes which they know to be in diametrical and flagrant contradiction to the will and purpose of God, that obstinately they prefer to stick by their own desires, and, if it may be, to stifle the voice of God.

Then, remember, too, that this refusal, which in reality is the rising up of the creature's will, tastes, inclinations, desires against the manifest and recognized will of God may, and as a matter of fact often does, go along with a great deal of lip reverence and unconsciously hypocritical worship. These men from whom the writer is drawing his warning in the wilderness there, said, "Don't let *Him* speak ! We are willing to obey all that He has to command ; only let it come to us through human lips, and not in these tremendous syllables that awe our spirits." They thought themselves to be perfectly willing to keep the commandments when they were given, and all that they wanted was some little accommodation to human weakness in the selection of the medium by which the word was brought. So we may be wrenching ourselves away from the voice of God,

because we uncomfortably feel that it is against our resolves, and all the while may never know that we are unwilling to obey His commandments. The unconscious refusal is the formidable and the fatal one.

It comes by reason, as I have said, fundamentally from the rising up of our own determinations and wishes against His commandments; but it is also due to other causes operating along with this. How can you hear God's voice if you are letting your own yelping dog-kennel of passions speak so loudly as they do? Will God's voice be heard in a heart that is all echoing with earthly wishes, loudly clamant for their gratification, or with sensual desires passionately demanding their food to be flung to them? Will God's voice be heard in a heart where the janglings of contending wishes and earthly inclinations are perpetually loud in their brawling? Will it be heard in a heart which has turned itself into a sounding board for all the noises of the world and the voices of men? The voice of God is heard in silence, and not amidst the Babel of our own hearts. And they who, unconsciously perhaps of what they are doing, open their ears wide to hear what they themselves in the lower parts of their souls prescribe, or bow themselves in obedience to the precepts and maxims of men round them, are really refusing to hear the voice of God.

It is not to be forgotten, howsoever, that whilst thus the true and proper application of these words is to Christian men, and the way by which we refuse to listen to that awful utterance is by withdrawing our lives from the control of His will, and dragging away our contemplations from meditation upon His word,



yet there is a further form in which men may refuse that voice, which eminently threatened the persons to whom this warning was first directed. All through this letter we see that the writer is in fear that his correspondents should fall away into intellectual and complete rejection of Christianity. And the reason was mainly this, that the fall of the ancient and sacred system of the old covenant might lead them to distrust all revelation from God, and to cast aside the Gospel message. So the exhortation of my text assumes a special closeness of application to us whose lot has been cast in revolutionary times as was theirs, and who have, in our measure, something of that same experience to go through, which made the sharp trial of these Hebrew Christians. To them, solid and permanent as they had fancied them, ancient and God-appointed realities and ordinances were melting away; and it was natural that they should ask themselves, "Is there anything that will not melt, on which we can rest?" And to us in this day much of the same sort of discipline is appointed; and we, too, have to see, both in the religious and in the social world, much evidently waxing old and ready to vanish away which our fathers thought to be permanent. And the question for us is, Is there anything that we can cling to? Yes! to the "voice that speaks from heaven" in Jesus Christ. As long as that is sounding in our ears we may calmly look out on the evanescence of the evanescent, and confidently rely on the permanence of the permanent. And so, brother, though this, that, and the other of the externals of Christianity, in polity, in form, in mode, may be passing away, be sure of this, the solid core

abides; and that core lies in the first word of this letter. "God . . . hath spoken unto us in His Son." See that no experience of mutation leads you to falter in your confidence in that voice, and "see that ye refuse not Him that speaketh."

II.—Again, note the sleepless vigilance necessary to counteract the tendency to refusal.

"See that ye refuse not." A warning finger is, as it were, lifted. Take heed against the tendencies that lie in yourself and the temptations around you. The consciousness of the possibility of the danger is half the battle. "Blessed is the man that feareth always," says the psalm. "The confident"—by which is meant the presumptuous, and not the trustful—"goeth on and is punished." The timid—by which I mean the self-distrustful—clings to God, because he knows his danger, and is safe. If we think that we are on the verge of falling, we are nearer standing than we ever are besides. To lay to heart the reality, and the imminence, and the gravity of the possibility that is disclosed here is an essential part of the means for preventing its becoming a reality. They who would say "I cannot turn away because I have come," have yet to learn the weakness of their own hearts and the strength of the world that draws them away. There is no security for us except in the continual temper of rooted self-distrust, for there is no motive that will drive us to the continual confidence in which alone is security but the persistent pressure of that sense that in ourselves we are nothing, and cannot but fall. I want no man to live in that selfish and anxious dread "which hath torment," but I am sure that the shortest road to the brave security

which is certain of never being defeated is the clear and continual consciousness that

In ourselves we nothing can,  
Full soon were we down-ridden ;  
But for us fights the proper Man,  
Whom God Himself hath bidden.

The dark underside of the triumphant confidence, which on its sunny side looks up to heaven and receives its light, is that self-distrust which says always to ourselves, "We have to take heed lest we refuse Him that speaketh."

If there is any need to dwell upon specific methods by which this vigilance and continuous self-distrust may work out for us our security, one would say—by careful trying to reverse all these conditions which, as we have seen, lead us surely to the refusal. Silence the passions, the wishes, the voices of your own wills and tastes and inclinations and purposes. Bring them all into close touch with Him. Let there be no voice in your hearts till you know God's will; and then with a leap let your hearts be eager to do it. Keep yourselves out of the babble of the world's voices; and be accustomed to go by yourselves and let God speak. Nature seems to be silent to the busy traveller who never gets away from the thumping of the piston of the engine, and the rattle of the wheels of the train. Let him go and sit down by himself on the mountain top, and the silence becomes all vocal and full of noises. Go into the lone place of silent contemplation, and so get near God, and you will hear His voice. But you will not hear it unless you still the beating of your own heart. Even in such busy lives as most

of us have to live it is possible to secure some space for such solitary communion and meditation if we seriously feel that we must, and are ready to cut off needless distractions. He who thus has the habit of going alone with God will be able to hear his voice piercing through the importunate noises of earth, which drown it for others. Do promptly, precisely, perfectly, all that you know He *has* said. That is the way to sharpen your ears for the more delicate intonations of His voice, and the closer manifestations of His will. If you do not, the voice will hush itself into silence. Thus bringing your lives habitually into contact with God's word, and testing them all by it, you will not be in danger of "refusing Him that speaketh."

III.—Lastly, note the solemn motives by which this sleepless vigilance is enforced.

"If they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth"—or, perhaps, "who on earth refused Him that spake"—"much more shall not we escape if we turn away from Him that speaketh from Heaven." The clearness of the voice is the measure of the penalty of non-attention to it. The voice that spoke on earth had earthly penalties as the consequence of disobedience. The voice that speaks from heaven, by reason of its loftier majesty, and of the clearer utterances which are granted to us thereby, necessarily involves more severe and fatal issues from negligence to it.

Mark how the words of my text deepen and darken in their significance in the latter portion. In the first we had simply "refusal," or the desire not to hear the voice, and in the latter portion that has solidified and

deepened itself into "turning away from Him." That is to say, when we once begin, as many professing Christians have begun, to be intolerant of God's voice meddling with their lives, we are upon an inclined plane, which, with a sharp pitch and a very short descent, carries us down to the darker condition of "turning away from Him." The man that stops his ears will very soon turn his back and be in flight, so far as he can, from the voice. Do not tamper with God's utterances. If you do, you have begun a course that ends in alienation from Him.

Then mark, again, the evils which fell upon these people who turned away from Him that speaketh on earth were their long wanderings in the wilderness, and their exclusion from the Land of Promise, and final deaths in the desert, where their bleaching bones lay white in the sunshine. And if you and I, dear friends, by continuous and increasing deafness to our Father's voice, have turned away from Him, then all that assemblage of flashing glories and majestic persons, and of reconciling blood to which we come by faith, will melt away, "and leave not a wrack behind." We shall be like men who, in a dream, have thought themselves in a king's palace, surrounded by beauty and treasures, and have awakened with a start and a shiver to find themselves alone in the desert. It will be loss enough if the fair city which hath foundations, and the palace-home of the king on the mountain, and the joyful assemblage of the angels, and the Church of the firstborn, and the spirits of the just made perfect, and the blood of sprinkling, all pass away from our vision, and instead of them there is nothing left but this mean, vulgar, fleeting world.

They *will* pass if you do not listen to God, and *that* is why so many of you have so little conscious contact with the unseen and glorious realities to which faith gives access.

But then there are dark and real penalties to come in another life which the writer dimly shows to us. It is no part of my business to enlarge upon these solemn warnings. An inspired man may do it. I do not think that it is reverent for me to do it much. But at the same time let me remind you that terror is a legitimate weapon to which to appeal, and unwelcome and unfashionable as its use is nowadays, it is one of the weapons in the armoury of the true preacher of God's Word. I believe we Christian ministers would do more if we were less chary of speaking out "the terror of the Lord." And though I shrink from anything like vulgar and rhetorical and sensational appeals to that side of divine revelation, and to what answers to it in us, I consider that I should be a traitor to the truth if I did not declare the fact that such appeals are legitimate, and that such terror is a part of the Divine Revelation.

So, dear friends, though I dare not dwell upon these, I dare not burke them. I remind you—and I do no more—of the tone that runs through all this letter, of which you have such instances as these, "If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression received its just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" and "Of how much sorer punishment, think you, shall they be thought worthy who have counted the blood of the Covenant wherewith they were sanctified a common thing?"



“See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh,” for the clearer, the tenderer, the more stringent the beseechings of the love and the warnings of Christ’s voice, the more solemn the consequences if we stop our ears to it. Better to hear it now, when it warns, and pleads, and beseeches, and comforts, and hallows, and quickens, than to hear it first when it rends the tombs and shakes the earth, and summons all to judgment, and condemns some to the outer darkness to which they had first condemned themselves.



## XIV.

### How Jesus Deepened a Shallow Confession.

“THE same came to Jesus by night, and said unto Him, Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God : for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him.”—  
JOHN iii. 2.



THE singular designation of Nicodemus in roundabout fashion as “a man of the Pharisees” connects this narrative with the preceding verses, in which we hear of many who believed in Christ, but to whom our Lord did not commit Himself, because “He knew all men,” and also “knew what was in man.” One such man was Nicodemus, to whom, however, exceptionally our Lord did commit Himself, though his faith, too, was but based upon miracle, because He saw that there was in him the capacity for nobler and fuller faith. Reticence and frankness were equally the results of His insight, and each appropriate in its place.

The confession of Nicodemus is incomplete and faulty in more than one respect, but still our Lord must have discerned in him the desire for fuller light, and so, as always, He gratifies it. Nicodemus only

recognizes Jesus Christ as a Teacher; and the whole context is profoundly instructive as showing us how our Lord desired to substitute for that inadequate conception of Himself a truer one; and also as instructing us in the path by which a man may pass from the shallower to the deeper; and, beginning with the acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as a Teacher, may be led to see in Him the Son of Man who came down from heaven to give life unto the world. It is this process to which I desire especially to turn attention in this sermon. It has for its two termini Nicodemus' confession, "We know that Thou art a Teacher come from God," and Christ's declaration, "The Son of Man must be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

I.—So, then, first, look at the inadequate and faulty starting-point.

Nicodemus' confession, howsoever to the all-seeing eye of Christ it may have yielded the promise of something better in the future, was manifestly inadequate in more than one particular. It was imperfect in its conception of Him. He acknowledges that Jesus Christ is a "rabbi," and that was a great deal from a rabbi regularly trained, who had graduated in the schools, and had his degree of Master in the legitimate, educational fashion. And now he sees that in this Galilean peasant, a stranger to all the assemblages of Jewish learning, there did dwell the power of a teacher. He emphasizes the irregularity of His promotion to the office because, in the original, "from God" occupies an unusual and emphatic position in the sentence, as if it explained how the

doctor of the schools condescended to recognize the doctor that had never been in any of them. He sees in Him a Teacher; and that is all. He was only one of a long series, from Moses downwards, whose words during all the ages had been as empty wind whistling through an archway, powerless to arrest evil, and impotent to bring the golden age. Here is another of the long, dreary succession, with no more weapons than His predecessors, and no more prospect of doing much with the weapons that He had. "Thou art a Teacher, come from God"; and there an end.

His confession is imperfect in its alleged basis. What did Nicodemus mean by demonstrating—surely most superfluously and inappropriately—to Jesus Christ that He was a Teacher because He could work miracles? It looks as if he were not quite sure of his own ground, and was quite as much strengthening his own somewhat tremulous convictions by this most *mal à propos* introduction of the reasons which had led him to his faith, such as it was. It was built entirely upon the fact of miracle. Now, all through this Gospel eminently, and, though less manifestly, in other parts of Scripture, a faith which has no account to give of itself beyond this, that it is produced by miracles, is treated as the lowest possible form of faith; and as scarcely deserving to be called so at all. It is not enough that a man should recognize the commission of the Messenger because He does wonderful works. What is wanted is that his heart should leap up in response to the message, and that it, and not the authority of the speaker, should be the thing that commends both speaker and message to him. A man who only says, "Thou hast done

things which I could not do, therefore perforce I must take Thee to be a Messenger of God"; and does not say, "Thy words search my heart and fill my spirit, and find an answer to my inmost being, by their sweetness and their power, which leaves me no alternative but to accept their truth"—such a man is only in the swaddling-bands of faith, and has to grow much before it be matured. Or, to put it into more modern words, the evidence of Christianity, which past generations used to parade as being the strongest and the all-sufficient, is in reality the weakest and lowest kind of proof. The *word* itself, not the sign which accompanies it; the flashing of the lightning, and not the bellow of the thunder, should be the means of commending the truth. And only the faith which grasps the substance of the message, and says, "I believe that because of what it is," is the faith which Scripture recognises as adequate and lofty.

This confession was not only inadequate in its substance and imperfect in its grounds, but it was not altogether satisfactory in its temper. Why did he come at night? Either because he was frightened, or because he was ashamed. He seems to have been but a timid soul at the best; for, at a much subsequent period, and when, as we may suppose, he was more conclusively and thoroughly a disciple of Jesus Christ, he did not venture to open his mouth, and stand up in the Sanhedrim and say before them all, "*I believe in Him.*" But all that he could do was to suggest certain considerations in arrest of hasty proceedings, carefully suppressing the fact that he himself was a disciple. And even at the very end it was only when he was heartened by the example of a stronger and

braver brother, Joseph of Arimathea, that he ventured to unite himself with him in the request for the body of Jesus. No doubt he was also ashamed that he, a rabbi, a member of the Sanhedrim, high in place and reputation, with all the legitimate sources of theological knowledge open to him in the schools, should be coming to this peasant to get information. Again, there is an unpleasant smack of patronage about that "We know," as if he felt the full value of the certificate that he was giving to this new beginner, and as if he was not unaware of his condescension in coming down from his height. There is a kind of intellectual conceit, too, about the "We know." For whom was he speaking? Was there some little knot of rabbis that had sent him as a messenger to get further information; or was he—as is more probable, I think—giving utterance to the unspoken convictions that were fighting in the breast of the whole set of them? If, at this early day, these convictions existed, that makes more criminal their subsequent attitude, when, with equal confidence in their own infallibility, and equal assurance that what they thought was absolute truth, and was to be rammed down other people's throats because they thought it, they declared: "*We know* that this Man is a sinner"; and then, forgetting the alleged sweep of their knowledge, but equally confident in the absolute correctness of their judgment, said further: "*We know not* from whence He is"—and what *we* do not know is not to be known!

A creed which says "Christ is a Teacher," and stops there, and which patronizes Him to some extent by recognizing the irregular wisdom that gleams in His words, and supposes that its knowledge is a line



deep enough to go to the bottom of the bottomless, and that what it does not know is not to be known—such a creed did not cease to haunt Christianity when Nicodemus passed away. We can recall teachers and writers of no mean repute who take up exactly this position, pay compliments to the Galilean peasant, speak about the elevation of His teaching, and withal do it with such a smack of intellectual self-sufficiency as declares that they, the certifiers, think themselves to be at least upon a level with Him, the certificated. Perhaps the cultivated mind of modern Europe, and the enlightenment of this enlightened day, do not fathom the unfathomable after all. It is just possible that there may be more in Jesus Christ than these people's eyes have seen. I would even venture the heresy of saying that a trim, compact Christianity, which will have no terms kept with mystery, and knows that Jesus Christ is a Teacher and nothing more, by its very freedom from everything that is not utterly plain and intelligible to the most cursory eye writes its own condemnation. Whatever may be true about Him, that cannot be true, because it is so shallow.

II.—I ask you to look, secondly, at the deeper view of man's need which convicts this conception of Christ of inadequacy.

Jesus answered, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." That saying answers Nicodemus' thoughts. It meets the whole conception of what the kingdom of God was to be, and what sort of a leader He was to be that brought it, which underlay the inadequate confession of which I have been speaking. Without entering

into questions, interesting as they might be in their place, which would take us much too far away from our present subject, as to the full significance and manifold applications of that great phrase, "the kingdom of God"; and whether "seeing" and "entering" it are equivalent; I just notice that the kingdom of God must be, whatever else it be, a state or condition in which a society of men obey absolutely the sovereign will of God. The idea of the rule of that Divine will over men's wills is the fundamental notion expressed in this Scriptural phrase, "the kingdom of God." And Christ's doctrine here, in so far as it answers Nicodemus' confession, is just this in effect—"Ah! Men want something a great deal more thorough than a teacher before they can pass into a state of obedience to the sovereign will of God. For true submission to Him, for the realization, therefore, of the very destiny of humanity, and for the possession and enjoyment of true blessedness and peace, it is not a teacher that will serve your turn. You want something else than that."

This declaration of the inadequacy of mere instruction to do what men must have done for them, in order that they may pass into God's kingdom, is the answer to all such imperfect and fragmentary conceptions of Christ's nature as have just been expressed by Nicodemus. There must be a thorough radical change in humanity before it becomes part of the true kingdom of God. Christ bases that upon the verifiable fact that the will of man is alienated from the will of God, and that, from generation to generation, that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and the alienation is transmitted from parent to child.

Therefore there must be something else and other than Teacher, if men are to come to obedience to the will of God. The deepest need of man is not to know but to be helped to do. There must be a new birth, a new life. Ludicrously inadequate to the necessities of the case are representations which confine the Divine intervention to the sending of a Teacher, however perfect a revealer of truth, however absolute and complete. The worst man knows more than the best man practises. And if we are to get no help but larger knowledge and clearer instruction, we shall never be able either to see or enter the kingdom of God. You cannot put out Vesuvius with a teaspoonful of cold water. And you cannot make a man fit to be a subject of the kingdom of God by any gospel of which the ultimate word is teaching. You need something far more radical and thorough, even the communication of a new life.

III.—Notice the only means by which this necessity can be met.

Nicodemus' question to our Lord, in response to that declaration of the needs of the case, is by no means so foolish as it is often represented to be. It falls into two halves. "How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" The second part of it shows that he correctly regarded our Lord's saying as being figurative; and the first part was the most appropriate question that he could ask. He recognizes the necessity; at least he does not contest it; he says, in effect, "I admit that teaching will not meet the needs. We want something more than that; we want a radical change of the man's nature. The

point is, how are we to get the radical change?" And our Lord answers that for us in that profound set of sayings of which I can only touch the salient points. The recognition of the necessity for a radical moral change and new beginning of life, as the condition of seeing the kingdom, seems to Nicodemus to be equivalent to shutting the door of hope by making that necessary which is impossible. His question as to *how* it can be is almost a denial *that* it can be, and has a tone of despair as well as of interrogation. And Jesus Christ answers, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Without the Divine Spirit there can be no new life for men; without new life there will be no entrance into the kingdom.

Now I am not going to enter upon minute observations as to the details of our Lord's words here. I only point out that "water and the Spirit" seems to me to be a phrase in entire parallelism with John the Baptist's similar phrase, "the Holy Ghost and fire," two symbolical elements, however different in the two cases, bearing the same relation in each to the Spirit with whom they are associated, and each expressing the same idea of a purifying and cleansing power. At all events, whether there be any reference to baptism or no, in the "water and the Spirit" it is clear that "the Spirit" is the essential factor, for in the immediately subsequent repetition of the phrase our Lord omits all mention of the water, and dwells only upon "the Spirit." That is to say, if men are to live a new life, it is God who must vitalise them. They cannot create it for themselves or for one another. The law remains, "like begets like"; the stream cannot rise

higher than its source. Nothing which is only man can re-create a man, make him over again, and change the flesh, which is its own law, into the spirit which submits to God's will. It must be a Divine power that does that.

And if such a Divine power come, then the life which it produces, even within the husk and shell of humanity, though compassed about and weakened in its manifestations, as it will be, by the surrounding flesh, will be cognate, and like that which produces it. So "the wind bloweth where it listeth." The life which the Divine Spirit breathes into a man will be free from control, and mighty by its own inherent power. The law within will be the impulse; and where the spirit of the Lord is, there will be liberty. That life, inbreathed into men by the Divine Spirit, will be invisible in itself, but gloriously manifest in its effect. "Thou hearest the sound thereof," whether gentle as in the rustling of the summer wind amongst the leaves of the spreading trees, or mighty as in the rush of the tempest. That life, inbreathed by a Divine Spirit into our torpor and frailness, will have its source in a hidden place, and its goal in an unseen glory; "for thou canst not tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth." The fact of sin justly estimated demands for its rectification something more than a Teacher, even a thorough new direction given to humanity comparable to a new birth, and the condition of that problem can only be met and solved by the actual communication of a Divine life.

So far our Lord brings this man. And then comes Nicodemus' second question, "How can these things be?"

IV.—The answer is, fourthly, the full conception of Jesus Christ which meets all the necessities of the case.

I cannot do more than grasp the one central point in the subsequent words of our Lord. It lies in the declaration of the deepest and the highest truth, concerning, first, His person, and, second, His work. He is not "a Teacher sent from God." "He is the Son of God who came down from Heaven." His task is not to impart instruction, but to communicate everlasting life. His place of power is not the rabbi's throne, but the Cross. He was lifted up there that He might destroy the poison, in the likeness of which He suffered. The sinless Son became sin for us; and died upon the Cross that life might come to men. This is the true thought of Him. None of your shallow, inadequate conceptions of Him as a Teacher, but as the Divine and dying Son of Man, to whom men must cling if they are to get any real blessing from Him. He does reveal, but He does more than reveal. He did not come to *say*, He came to *be*, and to *do*. He did not come to teach, but He came to minister and to die. And in that ministration and death there lie, not only lessons of the deepest truth, but the powers of the mightiest renovation, and of new life for men.

So, brethren, I beseech you, ask yourselves whether our own experience of our own characters, and our observations of the characters of others, do not confirm this central thought with which our Lord seeks to deepen this man's conception of Him—viz., that, if ever we are to enter the kingdom of God, we want to be radically changed; that if we are thus to



be partakers of the new life, it can only be by the operation of the Divine Spirit; and that our only means of receiving such a Divine Spirit lies in our simple faith in the Christ who is the Teacher indeed, but who is the sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Old legends tell us of one who came from the abode of the gods, with a spark of Divine fire hidden in a hollow reed. Christ has come from the throne, with the fiery life which He will give to all that trust Him, hidden in the frail reed of His manhood. If we will take Him for ours, He will give us of that life by His Spirit, and the law of the spirit of life in Jesus Christ will make us free—and nothing else will—from the law of sin and death. Do not cling to the half-eclipsed “Christ,” a “Teacher sent from God,” but open all the windows of your heart to the light and life of the full-orbed Son of God and Son of Man, who will give to all that trust Him eternal life.



## XV.

### The Lowliness and Loftiness of Jesus.

"JESUS saith unto her, Give Me to drink."

"Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am He."—  
JOHN iv. 7, 26.



HIS evangelist very significantly sets side by side our Lord's conversations with Nicodemus and with the woman of Samaria. The persons are very different; the one a learned rabbi of reputation, influence, and large theological knowledge of the then fashionable kind; the other an alien woman, poor—for she had to do this menial task of water-drawing in the heat of the day—and of questionable character.

The diversity of persons necessitates great differences in the form of our Lord's address to each; but the resemblances are as striking as the divergences. In both we have His method of gradually unveiling the truth to a susceptible soul, beginning with symbol and a hint, gradually enlarging the hint and translating the symbol; and finally unveiling Himself as the Giver and the Gift. There is another resemblance; in both the characteristic gift is that of the Spirit of Life, and, perhaps, in both the symbol is the same. For we read in one of "water and the Spirit"; and in

the other of the fountain within, springing into everlasting life. However that may be, the process of teaching is all but identical in substance in both cases, though in form so various.

The words of our Lord's which I have taken for our text now are his first and last utterance in this conversation. What a gulf lies between! They are linked together by the intervening sayings, and constitute with these a great ladder, of which the foot is fast on earth, and the top fixed in heaven. On the one hand, He owns the lowest necessities; on the other, He makes the highest claims. Let us ponder on this remarkable juxtaposition, and try to gather the lessons that are plain in it.

I.—First, then, I think we see here the mystery of the dependent Christ.

"Give Me to drink." "I am He." Try to see the thing for a moment with the woman's eyes. She comes down from her little village, up amongst the cliffs on the hillside, across the narrow, hot valley, beneath the sweltering sunshine reflected from the bounding mountains, and she finds, in the midst of the lush vegetation round the ancient well, a solitary, weary Jew, travel-worn, evidently exhausted—for His disciples had gone away to buy food, and He was too wearied to go with them—looking into the well, but having no dipper or vessel by which to get any of its cool treasure. We lose a great deal of the meaning of Christ's request if we suppose that it was merely a way of getting into conversation with the woman, a "breaking of the ice." It was a great deal more than that. It was the utterance of a felt and painful necessity, which He Himself could not supply without

a breach of what He conceived to be His filial dependence. He could have brought water out of the well. He did not need to depend upon the pitcher that the disciples had unthinkingly carried away with them when they went to buy bread. He did not need to ask the woman to give, but He chose to do so. We lose much if we do not see in this incident far more than the woman saw, but we lose still more if we do not see what she did see. And the words which the Master spoke to her are no mere way of introducing a conversation on religious themes ; but He asked for a draught which He needed, and which He had no other way of getting.

So, then, here stands, pathetically set forth before us, our Lord's true participation in two of the distinguishing characteristics of our weak humanity—subjection to physical necessities and dependence on kindly help. We find Him weary, hungry, thirsty, sometimes slumbering. And all these instances are documents and proofs for us that He was a true man like ourselves, and that, like ourselves, He depended on "the woman that ministered to Him" for the supply of His necessities ; and so knew the limitations of our social and else helpless humanity.

But then a wearied and thirsty man is nothing of much importance. But here is a man who *humbled Himself* to be weary and to thirst. The keynote of this gospel, the one thought which unlocks all its treasures, and to the elucidation of which, in all its aspects, the whole book is devoted, is, "The Word was made flesh." Only when you let in the light of the last utterance of our text, "I that speak unto thee am He," do we understand the pathos, the sublimity,

the depth, and blessedness of meaning which lies in that first one, "Give Me to drink." When we see that He bowed Himself, and willingly stretched out His hands for the fetters, we come to understand the significance of these traces of His manhood. The woman says, with wonder, "How is it that Thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me?" and that was wonderful. But, as He hints to her, if she had known more clearly who this Person, that seemed to be a Jew, was, a deeper wonder would have crept over her spirit. The wonder is that the Eternal Word should need the water of the well, and should ask it of a poor human creature.

And why this humiliation? He could, as I have said, have wrought a miracle. He that fed five thousand; He that had turned water into wine at the rustic marriage-feast, would have had no difficulty in quenching His thirst if He had chosen to use His miraculous power therefor. But He here shows us that the true filial spirit will rather die than cast off its dependence on the Father. And the same motive which led Him to reject the temptation in the wilderness, and to answer with sublime confidence, "Man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word from the mouth of God," forbids Him here to use other means of securing the draught that He so needed than the appeal to the sympathy of an alien, and the swift compassion of a woman's heart.

And then, let us remember that the motive of this willing acceptance of the limitations and weaknesses of humanity is, in the deepest analysis, simply His love to us; as the mediæval hymn has it, "Seeking me, Thou satest weary."

In that lonely traveller, worn, exhausted, thirsty, craving for a draught of water from a stranger's hand, is set forth "the glory of the Father, full of grace and truth." A strange manifestation of Divine glory this! But if we understand that the glory of God is the lustrous light of His self-revealing love, perhaps we shall understand how, from that faint, craving voice, "Give me to drink," that glory sounds forth more than in the thunders that rolled about the rocky peak of Sinai. Strange to think, brethren, that the voice from those lips, dry with thirst, which was low and weak, was the voice that spoke to the sea, "Peace, be still," and there was a calm; that said to demons, "Come out of him," and they evacuated their fortress; that cast its command into the grave of Lazarus, and he came forth; and which one day all that are in the grave shall hear, and hearing shall obey. "Give me to drink." "I that speak unto thee am He."

II.—Secondly, we may note here the self-revealing Christ.

The process by which He gradually unveils His full character to this woman, so unspiritual and unsusceptible as she appeared at first sight to be, is interesting and instructive. It would occupy too much of your time for me to do more than set it before you in the barest outline. Noting the singular divergence between the two sayings which I have taken as our text, it is interesting to notice how the one gradually merges into the other. First of all, Jesus Christ, as it were, opens a finger of His hand to let the woman have a glimpse of the gift lying there, that that may kindle desire and hints at some occult depth in His person and nature all



undreamed of by her yet, and which would be the occasion of greater wonder, and of a reversal of their parts if she knew it. Then, in answer to her, half understanding that He meant more than met the ear, and yet opposing the plain physical difficulties that were in the way, in that He had "nothing to draw with, and the well is deep," and asking whether He were greater than our father Jacob, who also had given, and given not only a draught, but the well, our Lord enlarges her vision of the blessedness of the gift, though He says but little more of its nature, except in so far as that may be gathered from the fact that the water that He will give will be a permanent source of satisfaction, forbidding the pangs of unquenched desire ever again to be felt as pangs; and the other fact that it shall be an inward possession, leaping up with a fountain's energy, and a life within itself, towards, and into everlasting life. Next, He strongly assails conscience and demands repentance, and reveals Himself as the Reader of the secrets of the heart. Then He discloses the great truths of spiritual worship. And, finally, as a prince in disguise might do, He flings aside the mantle of which He had let a fold or two be blown back in the previous conversation, and stands confessed. "I that speak unto thee am He." That is to say, the kindling of desire, the proffer of the all-satisfying gift, the quickening of conscience, the revelation of a Father to be worshipped in spirit and in truth, and the final full disclosure of His person and office as the Giver of the gift which shall slake all the thirsts of men; these are the stages of His self-revelation.

Then, note, not only the process, but the substance

of the revelation of Himself. The woman had a far more spiritual and lofty conception of the office of Messiah than the Jews had. It is not the first time that heretics have reached a loftier ideal of some parts of the truth than the orthodox do. To the Jew the Messiah was a conquering king, who would help them to ride on the necks of their enemies, and pay back their persecutions and oppressions. To this Samaritan woman—speaking, I suppose, the conceptions of her race—the Messiah was One who was to “tell us all things.”

Jesus Christ accepts the position, endorses her anticipations, and in effect presents Himself before her and before us as the Fountain of all certitude and knowledge in regard to spiritual matters. For all that we can know, or need to know, with regard to God and man and their mutual relations; all that we can or need know in regard to manhood, its ideal, its obligations, its possibilities, its destinies; for all that we need to know of men in their relation to one another, we have to turn to Jesus Christ, the Messiah, who “will tell us all things.” He is the fountain of light; He is the foundation of certitude; and they who seek, not hypotheses and possibilities and conjectures and dreams, but the solid substance of a reliable knowledge must grasp Him, and esteem the words of His mouth and the deeds of His life more than their necessary food.

He meets this woman's conceptions as He had met those of Nicodemus. To him He had unveiled Himself as the Son of God, and the Son of Man who came down from Heaven, and is in Heaven, and ascends to Heaven. To the woman He reveals

Himself as the Messiah, who will tell us all truth, and to both as the Giver of the gift which shall communicate and sustain and refresh the better life. But I cannot help dwelling for a moment upon the remarkable, beautiful, and significant designation which our Lord employs here. "I that speak unto thee." The word in the original, translated by our version "speak," is even more sweet, because more familiar, and conveys the idea of unrestrained frank intercourse. Perhaps we might render "I that am talking with Thee!" and that our Lord desired to emphasize to the woman's heart the notion of His familiar intercourse with her, Messiah though He were, seems to me confirmed by the fact that He uses the same expression, with additional grace and tenderness about it, when He says, with such depth of meaning, to the blind man whom He had healed, "Thou hast both *seen* Him," with the eyes to which He gave sight and object of sight, "and it is He that talketh with thee." The familiar Christ who will come and speak to us face to face and heart to heart, as a man speaketh with his friend, is the Christ who will tell us all things, and whom we may wholly trust.

Note, too, how this revelation has for its condition the docile acceptance of the earlier and imperfect teachings. If the woman had not yielded herself to our Lord's earlier words, and, though with very dim insight, yet with a heart that sought to be taught, followed Him as He stepped from round to round of the ascending ladder, she had never stood on the top and seen this great vision. If you see nothing more in Jesus Christ than a man like yourself, compassed

with our infirmities, and yet sweet and gracious and good and pure, be true to what you know, and put it into practice, and be ready to accept all the light that dawns. They that begin down at the bottom with "Give me to drink," may stand at the top, and hear Him speak to them His unveiled truth and His full glory. "To him that hath shall be given." If any man wills to do His will he shall "know of the teaching."

III.—Lastly, we have here the universal Christ.

The woman wondered that, being a Jew, He spoke to her. As I have said, our Lord's first utterance is simply the expression of a real physical necessity. But it is none the less what the woman felt it to be, a strange overleaping of barriers that towered very high. A Samaritan, a woman, a sinner, is the recipient of the first clear confession from Jesus Christ of His Messiahship and dignity. She was right in her instinct that something lay behind His sweeping aside of the barriers, and coming so close to her with His request. These two, the prejudices of race and the contempt for woman, two of the crying evils of the old world, were overpassed by our Lord as if He never saw them. They were too high for men's puny limbs; they made no obstacle to the march of His Divine compassion. And therein lies a symbol if you like, but none the less a prophecy that will be fulfilled, of the universal adaptation and destination of the Gospel, and its independence of all distinctions of race and sex, condition, moral character. In Jesus Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, neither bond nor free, ye "are all one in Christ." If He had been but a Jew it was wonderful that He should talk

to a Samaritan. But there is nothing in the character and life of Christ, as recorded in Scripture, more remarkable and more plain than the entire absence of any racial peculiarities, or of characteristics owing to His position in space or time. So unlike His nation was He that the very *élite* of His nation snarled at Him and said: "Thou art a Samaritan!" So unlike them was He that one feels that a character so palpitatingly human to its core, and so utterly unlike its surroundings, is inexplicable but on the New Testament theory that He is not a Jew, a man only, but the Son of Man, the Divine embodiment of the ideal of humanity, Whose dwelling was on earth, but His origin and home in the bosom of God. Therefore Jesus Christ is the world's Christ, your Christ, my Christ, everybody's Christ, the Tree of Life that stands in the midst of the garden, that all men may draw near to it and gather of its fruit.

Brother, answer His proffer of the gift as this woman did: "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not"; neither go all the way to the world's broken cisterns to draw; and He will put into your hearts that indwelling fountain of life, so that you may say, like this woman's townspeople: "Now we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."



## XVI.

### The Universal Burden and its Bearer.

“THE Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”—ISAIAH liii. 6.



THE Ethiopian statesman asked, “Of whom speaketh the prophet this?” One at least of his suppositions has been gravely adopted, and “some other man” been suggested as pointed at by the prophet. It has also been maintained that we have here an ideal picture of the righteous Israel in its relation to the rest of the world and to God. But I suppose that these solutions would generally be admitted to be failures, and that the wonderful picture of the suffering servant of God in this great chapter would generally be recognised as a portrait of an individual. If it be that, there is only one Individual in history of whom it is a likeness. The life and death of Jesus Christ—lived and died five hundred years after the very latest date to which anyone has assigned this prophecy—fit it feature by feature, tint by tint, as nothing else can. And the minute external correspondences between the prophet’s vision and the Gospel story, important as these literal resemblances are, are mainly important as pointing onwards to the complete correspondence between the spirit and



functions of the suffering servant of the prophecy and of the Jesus Christ of the Gospel history.

Now it is of prime importance to mark that the only office, if I may so say, which the prophet describes the Servant as filling is the function of suffering. He is neither Teacher, nor Conqueror, nor Lawgiver, nor, here, King; He is only a Sufferer. That is what the Saviour of the world has to be, first of all. The rabbis have a legend, far wiser than most of their follies, which tells how Messiah is to be found sitting amongst the lepers at the gate of the city. The fable has in it the deep truth that He who saves the world must suffer with, and for, the world that He saves.

So I ask you to look at these great words of my text, in which the whole of this aspect of the Saviour's work is gathered into one pathetic symbol, "The Lord has made to light upon Him the iniquity of us all."

I.—Consider, then, first, the universal burden.

Of course, the speakers in my text are primarily the penitent Jewish nation, who at last have learned how much at first they had misunderstood the Servant of the Lord. But the "we" and the "all" of our text may very fairly be widened out so as to include the whole world, and every individual of the race. Iniquity is the universal burden of us all.

The fact that every man is a transgressor of the law of God is the prime fact of humanity, and the all-important truth needed for the apprehension of the very rudiments of the Gospel. We shall never know what we need, nor be able to understand what Christianity, as gathered in Christ—who is Christianity—offers to do for us, unless our eyes are opened and our consciences made sensitive, to the unwelcome but

undeniable truth, that we all "have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

I believe that almost all of the mistaken and unworthy conceptions of Christianity which have afflicted and do afflict the world are directly traceable to this—the failure to apprehend the radical fact affecting men's condition that they are all sinful, and therefore separated from God.

And so, dear brethren, knowing nothing at all about most of you, having never looked many of you in the face before, and very likely never being destined to any closer acquaintance with you, I come to you now to try to press upon you, to begin with, as the preliminary to all right understanding of Christian truth, and to our true attitude in regard to it, this fact, common to you and to me and to all our brethren, that we are all on the one platform of sinful men who have departed from the law and ways of God, and have thereby drawn down ruin upon ourselves.

There are differences immensely important in other respects between us, differences of culture, of talent, of opportunity; differences of outward life: some of us living respectable, decent, cleanly lives, full of many virtues and many graces; some of us, perhaps—for in such a multitude as are here gathered to night it is all but certain that there must be some—having done many a thing that, if it did not bring them within the grip of criminal law, at least sets them outside the decent, respectable classes of society. But, whatever may be the superficial differences, down below there is identity; and beneath all varieties of garb and vesture, and all diversities of culture, intelligence

profession, and all differences of degrees of civilization and of rank and position, wise man and fool, cultured man and savage, saint and criminal, loftiest and lowliest, all are alike in this, that they have sinned.

If there be any here to-night who have resisted convictions that have been working in their hearts, I pray that my rough, plain, poor words may reach them. It is no mere pulpit rhetoric in which I am indulging; and I am not speaking simply for the sake of thundering wrath over your heads, or of producing sensational effects, when I ask you to go into the dark chambers of your own hearts and to look how passions have rioted there, how the lusts of the flesh in some of us have darkened the light of the Spirit, how in all of us the word has been true even at our best and purest, "The God in whose hands thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, thou hast not glorified." You are at the bar, whether you know it or not, and God calls you to plead guilty or not guilty to this universal indictment, "all"—and therefore *thou*—"have sinned." Sin is the universal burden.

But, further, the evil that we do, going forth from us as deed, comes back upon us as guilt. Flung up, as it were, into the heavens, it falls back again on the head of the man that cast it. And so my text speaks of a recoil of the evil. "The Lord hath made to fall upon" some one "the iniquity" that had been audaciously cast up in the face of the heavens, as in scorn. "If 'twere done when 'tis done 'twere well 'twere done quickly," but seeing that it only *begins* when "'tis done," it is an awful thing to commit the smallest evil. The recoil of the gun bruises blue the shoulder of the man that fires it; and all our evil deeds, according to

the old proverb about curses, "come home to roost." There is guilt, and there is habit, and there is the uneasy, or worse, the silent and seared conscience; and there is the disturbance of the relation to God, and there is the flight of peace from the heart, and there is the onward look that says, "If there is a future it is a future of retribution, and every transgression and disobedience shall receive its *just* recompense of reward." Is not that a burden for us to carry?—the weight of evil pressing upon us, in its consequences, of guilt, disturbance, irritated or paralyzed conscience, and the foreboding that if we get what we deserve we shall get but a bitter weird. "Bread eaten in secret is pleasant," but it turns to gravel that breaks the teeth of the eater.

And so, dear brother and friend, we are all staggering under this burden. We forget it, we deny it, we will not look over our shoulders to see how big it is, we try to find refuge and rest in all manner of palliations and excesses, but there the fact remains, and those of you who are least aware of the weight that is pressing upon you are the most weighed down by it. The creatures that live at the bottom of the doleful sea, fathoms deeper than plummet has ever sounded, have to bear a pressure upon their frames all inconceivable by us men who walk upon the surface of the earth. And the deeper a man goes in the dark ocean of wrongdoing and wrongbeing, the heavier the weight of the compressed atmosphere above him, crushing him in. And yet, like those creatures that crawl on the slime, miles down in the dreary sea, where no light has come, they know not the weight that rests upon them, and never have dreamed of

how blessed it is to walk in the lighter air with the sun shining above them. There are some of you, grovelling down at the bottom of the ocean, to whom the liberty and illumination, the lightness and light-someness of the pure life which is possible, would seem miraculous.

Now, dear brethren, if these things which I have thus imperfectly touched upon be at all true, then it seems to me that the fact of universal sinfulness, with all its necessary, natural, and inevitable consequences, must be the all-important fact about a man. What we think about sin will settle all our religious ideas. If we pooh-pooh it, then we shall not want a Saviour. A man that will say wise things to us will serve our turn. If we rightly understand how heavy the burden is, and how impotent we are to get rid of it, then we shall not be ready to believe in the doctrine of every man his own redeemer, but we shall want, not merely a Saviour that talks to us, however wise and sweet and tender may be His words, or a Saviour that walks before us an embodied realization of the ideal humanity, but we shall want a Saviour that does something for us, and puts out of the way, somehow or other, that black load under which we are staggering. The appeal to the understanding is less powerful to bring men to a perception of Christ's redeeming work than that to the conscience. Once get a man to feel, as I pray God that you may feel, "I am a sinful man in Thy sight," and his heart will cry out for one who shall be to him all that no human being can be, even the Lord of his salvation and the Deliverer from his burden. What we think about our own sin will settle the form of our religious belief.

II.—And so, in the second place, I ask you to look at the one bearer of the burden.

“The Lord hath made to light upon Him the iniquity of us all.” Now I want you to observe that, in the compass of three verses of this chapter, there are seven distinct, emphatic, and harmonious utterances, all bearing on the one thought of the vicarious suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ. Harken!

(1) “He hath borne our griefs.” (2) “And carried our sorrows.” (3) “He was wounded for our transgressions.” (4) “He was bruised for our iniquities.” (5) “The chastisement of our peace was upon Him.” (6) “With His stripes we are healed.” And they are all gathered together in the final word of my text—“The Lord hath made to light upon Him the iniquity of us all.”

I venture to say that if these words, in the variety of their metaphor and the fulness of their description, do not teach the gospel that Jesus Christ bore in His sufferings the sins of the whole world, and bore them away, language has no meaning. Nothing could be more emphatic, nothing more reiterated, full, and confident than this sevenfold presentation of the great truth that He lived and suffered and died for us because He suffered and died instead of us.

“The Lord hath made to meet on Him the iniquity of us all.” He bore the burden. I am not going to argue; my business is to preach to-night; and, as I have said, if your consciences have at all grasped the gravity and depth of the fact of your own individual sinfulness, you want little more to predispose you to the joyful acceptance of that thought that the burden



may be lifted off your shoulders and laid on One who is mighty to save. Jesus Christ bore our sicknesses and our pains, according to the first of these sevenfold utterances, and one of our evangelists gives us at least one aspect in which that is true, when he points to His sympathy with men's physical necessities, and how, by taking these into the hands of His sympathy, He relieves the sufferers from them. All through that pure and lovely life He knit Himself most closely by the might of a sympathy, all the fuller because of His purity, to the most impure and sinful of men. Only those who have known what innocence suffers in compelled association with vice can, however faintly even they may do it, imagine what it was to Jesus Christ to walk amongst men with that righteous soul vexed with the evil around Him, as we might feel the touch of some rough and hard substance if the toughened skin of our palms were stripped off them. It was pain to Christ to sympathize. It was pain to Christ to dwell amongst men. His healing was done at the cost of sorrows; He wept before He could say, "Lazarus! Come forth!" He sighed ere He could say, "Eph pha tha! be opened!" No tear that He wiped away on earth but appealed to the fountain of tears within Himself; and no sorrow that He comforted but Himself bore. For is it not always the case that we must feel the evil we alleviate? and can any man be a comforter and a helper except at the price of taking into his own consciousness and experience the sorrows that he would alleviate? Much more, the one brother of us all, who has entered into relations with every human heart, had to bear, by that which in Him we almost degrade when we call it by the

hackneyed name of sympathy, the burdens that He bore away.

But turn for a moment from the sweet mysteries of His healing and comforting life to the darker mysteries of its close, and there see in how real, how tragic, how awful, and how unique a fashion the load of sin was laid on Jesus Christ. I know of no theory which redeems the story of Gethsemane and Calvary from the charge of being the history of a man whose courage collapsed when it came to be tested, except that which sees in the agony beneath the olives, in the bloody sweat, in the awful and pathetic words with which He appealed to His friends: "My soul is compassed about with sorrows even unto death," an element far more mysterious and awful than the mere shrinking of humanity from death. Surely, surely, the Lord and the Master, in the strength of whose name feeble women and tremulous virgins and little children have gone to the pyre and the scaffold and the lions, as to a feast, did not exhibit all that agitation and tremor and shrinking, only because He was afraid of the death that belongs to all men. Ask yourselves how reverence for Jesus Christ will survive in the face of the story of His last hours, unless, as we listen to Him crying, "My God! My God! why hast Thou forsaken Me," we hear the cry of Him who before His shearers was dumb, but opened His mouth at last in that mysterious complaint in which filial obedience and utter desolation are so strangely blended, because "the Lord hath made to light on Him the iniquity of us all"? The icy waters of that baptism with which He was baptized were fed from the black fountains of human corruption, and the only

explanation of the fact of Christ's passion is found in the recognition that therein He was bearing the sins of the whole world.

Remember that although my text speaks of that burden as being laid upon Him by the Lord, we are not to suppose that, therefore, it was not assumed by Him by His own loving volition. He bore our sins because He would. The Lord laid them upon Him; therefore the sacrifice appointed by God is accepted of God; but He chose to suffer, and He willed to die, because he loved thee, and me, and every soul of sinful men. There is the secret of the power of the Gospel. Brethren, a Christianity without a Christ whose death is the world's light and life, is a Christianity without power.

We hear a great deal to-day about the social side of Christian truth, and about the application of the principles of Christianity to the masses, with all of which I am in the fullest accord. Only let us begin where the Bible begins, and it begins with the sacrifice which heals the individual conscience. It is of no use to tinker at men's miseries unless you deal with men's sins; and there is only one thing that deals with men's sins, and that is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It is of no use beginning with masses, begin with the individual. It is of no use preaching the applications of the Christian system to social life, unless you have laid deep the foundations which the Bible lays—Jesus Christ died for every man, and in His death has taken away the guilt and penalty and broken the power of sin. Begin there, and all else will follow. Begin anywhere else, and you will be like a man that commences his house at the chimney instead of the

foundation; you will never build anything that will stand.

III.—And so, lastly, mark the men that are freed from the burden.

“He hath made to meet upon Him the iniquity of us all.” Yes! and yet it is possible for a man included in the “all” to have to stagger along through life under his burden, and to carry it with him when he goes hence. “Be not deceived, God is not mocked,” says the foremost preacher of the doctrine that Christ’s death takes away sin. “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. Ever man shall bear his own burden.” So your sins, taken away as they are by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, may yet cling to you and crush you. There is only one way, dear brethren, by which the possibilities open to all men by the death of Jesus Christ may become the actual experience of every man, or of any man—and that is, the simple laying your burden, by your own act of quiet trust, upon the shoulders of Him that is mighty to save.

I suppose it is not fashionable now to read “Pilgrim’s Progress”—more’s the pity! But you remember, I daresay, enough of it to know where the pilgrim got rid of his burden—viz., at the Cross. Dear friend, a weight far too heavy for you to carry will cleave to you like a clinging curse, and will crush you down at last. The burden of sin, the burden of guilt, the burden of an evil conscience, the burden of separation from God which is the true death, the burden of future judgment—is your back fit to carry all that? Well, then, why do you not turn yourself to Him and say—

My soul looks back to see  
The burden Thou didst bear,  
When hanging on the cursèd tree,  
And knows her guilt was there.

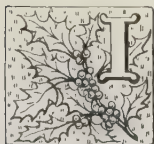
Most of you know that strange and infinitely pathetic picture that represents the Jewish scapegoat, panting, wounded, ready to die, on the salt margin of the sea of Death, whither it has been hounded, with the sins of a nation upon its head. The solitude, the sorrow, the suffering of Jesus Christ are faintly shadowed by that. Lay your hand on the head of the Sacrifice, and say, "Behold! I put my sin where God has put it, on the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world!"



## XVII.

### The Fountain of Life and the River.

"GOD so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."—JOHN iii. 16.



SUPPOSE many of you, like me, learned these words at your mother's knees, and have been familiar with them all your lives. Perhaps familiarity has dimmed their wonderfulness. The child that knows them knows more than, without them, the wisest could have conceived, or heaven, with all its angels, have expected. They are inexhaustible, and one shrinks from taking them as a text. And yet, though I know that my poor paraphrase can only weaken them, they contain so fully and completely the message which it is my desire to press upon your acceptance that I venture to do it. If I might fall back upon a metaphor, we have here the fountain-head, the love of God; the stream, the gift of Christ; the act of drinking, "whosoever believeth"; and the life-giving effects of the draught.

These great words begin in the heart of God; they end with a quickened world; and the links between



the beginning and the ending are, on the Divine side, Christ, and on the human, faith.

I.—I ask you, then, to look, first, at the fountain-head, the universal love of God.

“God . . . loved the world.” In these words there is the most wonderful apocalypse of the Divine nature that ever has been or shall be made. One knows not which thought is the more stupendous, that *God loves*, or that He loves *the world*.

“God loves.” Where, outside of Christianity, does anybody dare to say that as a certainty? Men have hoped it; men have feared that it could not be; men have dimly dreamed and strongly doubted; men have had gods cruel, gods lustful, gods capricious, gods good-natured, gods indifferent or apathetic, but a *loving* God is the discovery of Christianity. Neither the gross deities of heathenism, nor the shadowy god of Theism, nor the unknown somewhat, which, perhaps, makes for righteousness, of our modern agnostics, presents anything like this—“God loved.”

Do not let us be afraid of attributing the likeness of human emotions to the Divine Being, nor be frightened from accepting the whole blessed consolation and enlightenment which lies in this wonderful thought, by any solemn warnings, lest we degrade the Divine nature by supposing it to be altogether like ourselves. The spectrum has taught us that the metals in the sun are absolutely identical with the metals in this earth. Christianity teaches us that since man is Deiform, made in the Divine image, we have the right to argue the other way, and say that God and man are sufficiently alike to make it perfectly reverent and safe for us to believe that there is in God that which

answers to love in us; separated and purified indeed from limitations, removed from the possibility of chill and change, but yet alive with all the tenderness of yearning, with all the sweetness, with all the capacity for affording rest to another heart which we find in human love at its best.

We speak of that great Divine nature as being infinite, and that is an awful word; as being eternal, and that is a tremendous and sometimes a chilling thought; as being infinitely righteous; as wielding almighty power. But all these things that men call Divine attributes are but the fringe of His character, the halo round the orb, of which the central blaze is love. The only way by which a poor, finite, sinful heart can venture to grasp the awful thoughts that lie in these great words, Infinitude, Eternity, Omnipotence, Omniscience, Purity, is to regard them as characteristics of love, and say, "Yes! God's love is infinite, is eternal, is omnipotent, is omniscient, is all righteous and pure."

But then, on the other side, we have not only the revelation of the heart of God, but we have the wonderful word which declares the universality of the sweep of that love, "God loved the world."

Now, I want you to observe particularly that this designation of the object upon which the Divine love rested and rests eternally is to be interpreted according to the usage of this Gospel, and that usage distinctly gives to the expression "the world" not only the meaning of the total of humanity, but also the further meaning of humanity separated by its own evil from God. And so we get, not only the statement of the universality of the love of God, but also this great

truth, that no sin nor unworthiness, no unfaithfulness nor rebellion, nothing which degrades humanity even to its lowest depths, and seems all but to extinguish the spark within it that is capable of being fanned into a flame, has the least power to deflect, turn back, or alter the love of God. That love falls upon "the world," the mass of men who have wrenched themselves away from Him, but cannot wrench Him away from themselves. They never can prevent His love from pouring itself over them; even as the bright waters of the ocean will break over some grim rock, black in the sunshine. So, brethren, all the outcasts, criminals, barbarians, degraded people, that the world consents to regard as irrevocably bad and hopeless, are all grasped in His love. And you and I and every soul of man have a place there; and my sins and your sins do not prevent His love from circling about us, and longing after us, and wanting to bless us and bring us back to Himself. "God loves the world," the whole mass of sinful men. Do you believe that? Do you believe it about yourself?

We lose in the depth of our love in proportion as it gains in breadth, and the sentiment, when it comes to be spread over a race is very thin. We generalize and classify. In order to get a conception of the whole we lose sight of the individuals. But there are no classes or masses with God, and when the Bible tells us that He loves the world, that does not mean a diffused sentiment that grasps the whole and is almost oblivious of the individuals, as it would be with us. But He loves the world because He loves each unit that composes it. Just as in the heavens each star is set in its place, and all are included in

the great arch that sweeps above them, and yet each is separate, so

The glorious sky, embracing all,  
Is like the Maker's love,  
Wherewith, encompassed, great and small  
In peace and order move.

He loves all because He loves each. He loves the world because He loves me and thee and every single soul.

II.—Then note secondly the stream ; the gift which proves the love.

“God so loved the world that He gave His . . . Son.” Mark that collocation of words, in the next verse, where the same subject is dealt with, a different expression is employed. There we read, “God *sent* His Son.” But in my text, where the matter in hand is the love of God, *sent* is far too cold a word, and *gave* is used as congruous with *loved*. It must needs be that the Divine love manifest itself even as the human does by an infinite delight in bestowing. The very property and life of love, as we know it even in its tainted and semi-selfish forms as it prevails amongst us is to give, and the life of the Divine love is the same. He loves, and therefore He gives. His love is a longing to bestow Himself, and the proof and sign that He loves is that “He gave His only begotten Son.”

I need not remind you, I suppose, of the allusion, obvious in the language of my text, to that wonderful story in Genesis of the sacrifice of Isaac. You remember how, when the patriarch's trial was over, the approbation was spoken from heaven in these words. “Now I know that thou fearest God because

thou hast not withheld thine only son from Me." And we can reverently turn to Him and say, "Now know we that Thou lovest us, because Thou has not withheld Thine only Son from us."

Ah, brethren, there is more in that word "gave" than a bestowment. There is a surrender in it, and there is a surrender to death. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up to the death for us all; how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" I venture to believe that we may be warranted even in the thought that something not altogether dissimilar to the surrender of his only son to death which wrung the heart of the ancient patriarch is conceivable within that infinite Divine nature that spared not His Son, but gave Him up for us all.

Is not that the one proof of God's love? Creation, indeed, is the consequence, and therefore the sign of a Divine love; and we shall never understand why it was that God made worlds at all, unless we have pierced to the depth of the grand psalm which says, "To Him that made great lights, for His mercy endureth for ever."

But whilst Nature is the outcome of the Divine love, its witness is all uncertain and broken. The harp was once tuned by a Divine hand, but rude fingers have been swept across it, and it is now "like sweet bells jangled, harsh and out of tune." And there is no place where a poor soul can be sure of the love of God except here, in sight of Calvary, on the Cross of which it recognizes the Son of God dying for the sins of the world. I feel as much as any pessimist or agnostic of them all, the burden and "the weary

weight of all this unintelligible world." I know, as clearly as any man does, and I do not think I feel it less than most men do, how

Nature, red in tooth and claw,  
With rapine, shrieks against the creed

that God is love. But I believe in Jesus Christ and His Cross as the governing fact; and in the light of it it were folly and treason to doubt that all discords are capable of resolution into harmony; and that when the end comes we shall know what to-day, by that light, we are heartened to believe, that "God is in heaven, all's right with the world." "God so loved the world that He gave His . . . Son."

III.—Notice (and here I slightly alter the order of my text) the purpose of the gift that proves the love.

God so loved the world that He gave His Son in order that there might be escape from perishing and the possession of eternal life. Now here the one purpose of the gift—which is also the one longing of the love—is stated negatively and positively—"should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Now there are a great many people who would like to put the whole middle part of my text into a parenthesis, and bring together directly the first clause and the last, and say, "God so loved the world that everybody shall have eternal life, and nobody shall perish." But my text does not make such short work of it as that. It recognizes—and I wish to press upon you the recognition—that in order that the Divine love may reach its longing there must be a process; and that that process, looked at from the



Divine side, lies here, that God must send His Son if the world is *not* to perish; and looked at from the human side it lies here, that men must believe in the Son that is sent if they are to have eternal life.

There is, then, a danger which only the mission of Jesus Christ averts, that men may perish. That is a danger which is as universal as the love of which I have been speaking, for it is "the world" that is in danger of perishing, and that is a danger which is as individualizing and specific as the love of which I have been speaking, for "the world" that "perishes" is made up of single souls that do. In that category you have a place, and I, and all our brethren. Whoever stands in the great class of the objects of Divine love, belongs also to the class of those who are in risk of destruction. Oh! dear friends, it does not become me to fling about the thunderbolts of God, or to threaten and lighten as He has the right to do; but I do believe that much of the preaching of this generation is toothless, impotent, unblessed, because men have got too falsely tender-hearted and sentimental to talk about the necessary issue of alienation from God. Be you sure of this, that in whatever form it may be realized—and that is of secondary importance—the world, and especially you that have heard the Gospel all your days, and are hearing it, however imperfectly, again to-night, stands in peril of destruction. "To perish," whether it mean to be reduced into non-being, or whether it mean, as I believe it means, to be so separated from the one Source of life as that, conscious existence continuing, everything that made life beautiful and blessed and desirable is gone—to "perish" is the necessary end

of the man who wrenches himself away from God. You may continue to be, you may exercise many of the functions of life, you may go through the world with a tough skin and an indurated conscience, as some of you are doing, but destruction, in the awfulest meaning of the word, is the fate of the man who has turned away from God manifest in Jesus Christ. And I should be a traitor to my own convictions and a cruel friend to you, dear friends, if I did not warn you, and pray to God that the warning may get to some of you that need it, that you are upon an inclined plane, and the inclined plane will stop and you will not; and where will you be then? There is only one Hand that can put the break on. There is only one way by which God's love can stop a man from going down the slippery slope. "God so loved the world that He sent His Son that the world should not perish." It is going to ruin without Jesus Christ; and Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone, comes in to arrest the necessary tendency downwards, and to substitute for it the motion upwards towards the light and the life.

But arresting is not all. "Should have eternal life." And what lies in that? Surely something a great deal more than the unending continuance of being. I do not know how you feel, but to me many a time the prospect of living for ever and ever, on and on and on, seems to be infinitely awful. And so it would be, unless eternal life meant something a great deal more than that, meant the fulness of purity, of peace, of energy, of love and wisdom and joy all flooding into our souls with the possession of Jesus Christ. Life eternal lies in union with God, and the

only link that so binds men with God as to secure for them the possession of life eternal, with its inconceivable blessednesses, is "Christ that died, yea! rather that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

If heaven were only what some of you think it, a condition of blessedness that could be bestowed upon men at the arbitrary will of God, then be sure of this, that everybody would get it. For God desires to save the world; and, as my text tells us, "loves the world," and "sent His Son" that there should be no 'perishing'; and, as the next verse tells us yet more emphatically sent Him with this design, that "the world"—that is, everybody—"through Him might be saved." But future—ay! and present—blessedness cannot be given away in that haphazard fashion, as some prince from his throne may toss coins into a crowd indiscriminately. And just because it cannot, God's love has no other way of reaching its desire than the mission of Jesus Christ. He sent His Son that none should perish, but that all might have eternal life.

IV.—Lastly, to return to my metaphor, note the act of drinking, or the condition of receiving eternal life. "Whosoever believeth on Him."

Now I am not going to weary you now by talking theologically about what this condition is. You know what it is to trust one another. You have a husband or a wife or a father or a mother or a friend beloved on whom you rely implicitly. You trust the person, and you are at rest.

Now faith is just that. It is simply that act of trust which cements all human society together, and

which we are constantly exercising to those who are dear to us, transferred to God. It does not seem to me that there is any mystery in it at all. People have talked very learnedly, "and darkened counsel by words without wisdom," and the continual, parrot-like repetition of the cry to men, "Faith, faith, faith," has deadened to a great many of you the beautiful clearness and simplicity of the Gospel.

The old message is perhaps freshened by using a good old word, and saying, "*Trust* Jesus Christ." That is all. Trust Him, of course, for that for which God sent Him—to die for you and all of us. Since it was impossible for the downward tendency to be arrested without Jesus Christ, then Jesus Christ must have been the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, which took away their guilt and broke their power. And for my part I do not believe that faith in Jesus Christ means anything less than this, the trust of a sinful soul on Him as the only Saviour, because the only Sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Note the simplicity, but note also the rigidity of the condition. And note that the same individualizing universality of which I have been speaking, in reference to other parts of my subject applies to these conditions. "Whosoever." Very well, you can run your pen through "whosoever," and write your own name over it. It is not exactly a blank cheque, but you can endorse it if you like, and then it will be paid.

Ah, dear friend! it is an awful power which we have of rendering God's love of no effect to us, and of thwarting His purpose of love. This fleece has power to repel the dew, and so to be bone-dry amidst the most refreshing showers.

You can make Christ worthless to you if you like. You can make God's love of no use to you in regard of the highest purposes which it contemplates and the deepest desires which it cherishes. "Whosoever believeth." What is the use of the fountain pulsing up through eternity in the deep heart of God? What is the use of the stream running broad and deep and life-giving—a true river of water of life close by your feet—if you lock your lips, and will not put your pitcher in? You will die of thirst whilst the water is rippling past your dying body. "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." "If any man thirst"—you, and you, and you, and I—"If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink."



## XVIII.

### The Gospel in Small.

“THIS is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”—1 TIM. i. 15.



CONDENSATION is a difficult art. There are few things drier and more unsatisfactory than small books on great subjects, abbreviated statements of large systems. Error lurks in summaries, and yet here the whole fulness of God's communication to men is gathered into a sentence; tiny as a diamond, and flashing like it. My text is the one precious drop of essence, distilled from gardens full of fragrant flowers. There is an old legend of a magic tent, which could be expanded to shelter an army and contracted to cover a single man. That great Gospel which fills the Bible and overflows on the shelves of crowded libraries is here, without harm to its power, folded up into one saying, which the simplest can understand sufficiently to partake of the salvation which it offers.

There are five of these “faithful sayings” in the letters of Paul, usually called “the pastoral epistles.” It seems to have been a manner with him, at that time of his life, to underscore anything which he felt to be especially important by attaching to it this label.



They are all, with one exception, references to the largest truths of the Gospel. I turn to this one, the first of them, this evening for the sake of gathering some lessons from it.

I.—Note, then, first, here the Gospel in a nutshell.

“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” Now, every word there is weighty, and might be, not beaten out, but opened out into volumes. Mark who it is that comes—the solemn double name of that great Lord, “Christ Jesus.” The former tells of His Divine appointment and preparation, inasmuch as the Spirit of the Lord God is upon Him, anointing Him to proclaim good tidings to the poor, and to open the prison doors to all the captives, and asserts that it is He to whom prophets and ritual witnessed, and for whose coming prophets and kings looked wearily through the ages, and died rejoicing even to see afar off the glimmer of His day. The name of Jesus tells of the Child born in Bethlehem, who knows the experience of our lives by His own, and not only bends over our griefs with the pity and omniscience of a God, but with the experience and sympathy of a man.

“Christ Jesus came.” Then He *was* before He came. His own will impelled His feet, and brought Him to earth.

“Christ Jesus came to save.” Then there is disease, for saving is healing; and there is danger, for saving is making secure.

“Christ Jesus came to save sinners”—the universal condition, co-extensive with the “world” into which, and for which, He came. And so the essence of the Gospel, as it lay in Paul’s mind, and had been verified in his experience, was this—that a Divine person had

left a life of glory, and in wonderful fashion had taken upon Himself manhood in order to deliver men from the universal danger and disease. That is the Gospel which Paul believed, and which he commends to us as "a faithful saying."

Well, then, if that be so, there are two or three things very important for us to lay to heart. The first is the universality of sin. That is the thing in which we are all alike, dear friends. That is the one thing about which any man is safe in his estimate of another. We differ profoundly. The members of this congregation, gathered accidentally together, and perhaps never to be all together again, may be at the antipodes of culture, of condition, of circumstances, of modes of life; but, just as really below all the diversities there lies the common possession of the one human heart, so really and universally below all diversities there lies the black drop in the heart, and "we all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." It is that I want to lay on your hearts as the first condition to understanding anything about the power, the meaning, the blessedness of the Gospel which we say we believe.

And what does Paul mean by this universal indictment? If you take the vivid autobiographical sketch in the midst of which it is embedded, you will understand. He goes on to say "of whom I am chief." It was the same man that said, without supposing that he was contradicting this utterance at all, "touching the righteousness which is in the law" I was "blameless." And yet, "I am chief." So all true men who have ever shown us their heart, in telling their Christian faith, have repeated Paul's statement; from Augustine in his wonderful "Confessions," to John

Bunyan in his "Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners." And then prosaic men have said, "What profligates they must have been, or what exaggerators they are now!" No. Sewer gas of the worst sort has no smell; and the most poisonous exhalations are only perceptible by their effects. What made Paul think himself the chief of sinners was not that he had broken the commandments, for he might have said, and in effect did say, "All these have I kept from my youth up," but that, through all the respectability and morality of his early life there ran this streak—an alienation of heart, in the pride of self-confidence, from God, and an ignorance of his own wretchedness and need. Ah! brethren, I do not need to exaggerate, nor to talk about "splendid vices," in the untrue language of one of the old saints, but this I seek to press on you: that the deep, universal sin does not lie in the indulgence of passions, or the breach of moralities, but it lies here—"thou has left Me, the fountain of living water." That is what I charge on myself, and on every one of you, and I beseech you to recognize the existence of this sinfulness beneath all the surface of reputable and pure lives. Beautiful they may be; God forbid that I should deny it; beautiful with many a strenuous effort after goodness, and charming in many respects, but yet vitiated by this—"the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, thou hast not glorified." That is enough to make a man brush away all the respectabilities and proprieties and graces, and look at the black reality beneath, and wail out, "of whom I am chief."

But, further, Paul's condensed summary of the Gospel implies the fatal character of this universal

sin. "He comes to save," says he. Now what answers to "save" is either disease or danger. The word is employed in the original in antithesis to both conditions. To save is to heal and to make safe. And I need not remind you, I suppose, of how truly the alienation from God, and the substitution for Him of self or of creature, is the sickness of the whole man. But the end of sickness uncured is death. We "have no healing medicine," and the "wound is incurable" by the skill of any earthly surgeon. The notion of the sickness passes, therefore, at once into that of danger; for unhealed sickness can only end in death. Oh! that my words could have the waking power that would startle some of my complacent hearers into the recognition of the bare facts of their lives and character, and of the position in which they stand on a slippery inclined plane that goes straight down into darkness!

You do not hear much about the danger of sin from some modern pulpits. God forbid that it should be the staple of any; but God forbid that it should be excluded from any! Whilst fear is a low motive, self-preservation is not a low one; and it is to that that I now appeal. Brethren, the danger of every sin is, first, its rapid growth; second, its power of separating from God; third, the certainty of a future—aye! and *present*—retribution.

To me, the proof of the fatal effect of sin is what God had to do in order to stop it. Do you think that it would be a small, superficial cut which could be stanchcd by nothing else but the pierced hand of Jesus Christ? Measure the intensity of danger by the cost of deliverance, and judge how grave are the

wounds for the healing of which stripes had to be laid on Him. Ah! if you and I had not been in danger of death, Jesus Christ would not have died. And if it be true that the Son of God laid aside His glory, and came into the world and died on the cross for men, out of the very greatness of the gift, and the marvellousness of the mercy, there comes solemn teaching as to the intensity of the misery and the reality and awfulness of the retribution from which we were delivered by such a death. Sin, the universal condition, brings with it no slight disease and no small danger.

Further, we may gather from this condensed summary where the true heart and essence of the Christian revelation is. You will never understand it until you are contented to take the point of view which the New Testament takes, and give all weight and gravity to the fact of man's transgression and the consequences thereof. We shall never know what the power and the glory of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is until we recognize that, first and foremost, it is the mighty means by which man's ruin is repaired, man's downrush is stopped, sin is forgiven and capable of being cleansed. Only when we think of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as being, first and foremost, the redemption of the world by the great act of incarnation and sacrifice, do we come to be in a position in any measure to estimate its superlative worth.

And, for my part, I believe that almost all the mistakes and errors and evaporations of Christianity into a mere dead nothing which have characterized the various ages of the Church come mainly from this, that men fail to see how deep and how fatal are the wounds of sin, [and so fail to apprehend the Gospel as being

mainly and primarily a system of redemption. There are many other most beautiful aspects about it, much else in it that is lovely and of good report, and fitted to draw men's hearts and admiration, but all is rooted in this, the life and death of Jesus Christ, the Sacrifice by whom we are forgiven, and in whom we are healed. And if you strike that out, you have a dead nothing left—an eviscerated Gospel.

I believe that we all need to be reminded of that to-day, as we always do, but mainly to-day, when we hear from so many lips estimates, favourable or unfavourable to Christianity and its mission in the world, which leave out of sight, or minimize into undue insignificance, or shove into a backward place, its essential characteristic, that it is the power of God through Christ, His Son Incarnate, dying and rising again for the salvation of individual souls from the penalty, the guilt, the habit, and the love of their sins, and only secondarily is it a morality, a philosophy, a social lever.

I take for mine the quaint saying of one of the old Puritans, "When so many brethren are preaching to the times it may be allowed one poor brother to preach for eternity."

"This a faithful saying, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

II.—Now, secondly, note the reliableness of this condensed Gospel.

When a man in the middle of some slight plank, thrown across a stream, tests it with a stamp of his foot, and calls to his comrades, "It is quite firm," there is reason for their venturing upon it too. That is exactly what Paul is doing here. How does he



know that it is "a faithful saying"? Because he has proved it in his own experience, and found that in his case the salvation which Jesus Christ was said to effect has been effected. Now there are many other grounds of certitude besides this, but, after all, it is worth men's while to consider how many millions there have been from the beginning who would be ready to join chorus with the Apostle here, and to say, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." My experience cannot be your certitude; but if you and I are suffering from precisely the same disease, and I have tested a cure, my experience should have some weight with you. And so, brethren, I point you to all the thousands who are ready to say, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him."

Are there any that give counter-evidence; that say, "We have tried it. It is all a sham and imagination. We have asked this Christ of yours to forgive us, and He has not. We have asked Him to cleanse us, and He has not. We have tried Him and He is an Impostor, and we will have no more to do with Him"? There are people, alas! who have gone back to their wallowing in the mire, but it was not because Christ had failed in His promises, but because they did not care to have them fulfilled any more. Jesus Christ does not promise that His salvation shall work against the will of men who submit themselves to it.

But it is not only because of that consentient chorus of many voices—the testimony of which wise men will not reject—that the word is "a faithful saying." This is no place or time to enter upon anything like a condensation of the Christian evidence; but, in lieu of

everything else, I point to one proof. There is no fact in the history of the world better attested, and the unbelief of which is more unreasonable, than the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And if Christ rose from the dead—and you cannot understand the history of the world unless He did, nor the existence of the Church either—if Jesus Christ rose from the dead, it seems to me that almost all the rest follows of necessity—the influx of the supernatural, the unique character of His career, the correspondence of the end with the beginning, the broad seal of the Divine confirmation stamped upon His claims to be the Son of God and the Redeemer of the world. All these things seem to me to come necessarily from that fact. And I say—given the consentient witness of eighteen centuries, given the existence of the Church, given the effects of Christianity in the world, given that upon which they repose—the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead—the conclusion is sound, “This is a faithful saying, that He came into the world to save sinners.”

Men talk, nowadays, very often as if the progress of science and new views as to the evolution of creatures or of mankind had affected the certitude of the Gospel. It does not seem to me that they have in the smallest degree. “The foundation of God standeth sure,” whatever may become of some of the superstructures which men have built upon it. They may very probably be blown away. So much the better if we get the Rock to build upon once more. A great deal is going, but not the Gospel. Do not let us be afraid, or suppose that it will suffer. Do not let us dread every new speculation as if it was going to

finish Christianity, but recognize this—that the fact of man's sin and, blessed be God! the fact of man's redemption stand untouched by them all; and to-day, as of old, Jesus Christ is, and is firmly manifested to be, the world's Saviour. Whatsoever refuge may be swept away by any storms, "behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried corner-stone, a sure foundation: He that believeth shall not be confounded."

III.—Lastly, notice the consequent wisdom and duty of acceptance.

"Worthy of all acceptation," says Paul. Yes, of course, if it is reliable. That word of the Lord which is "sure, making wise the simple," deserves to be received. Now this phrase, "all acceptation," may mean either of two things: it may either mean worthy of being welcomed by all men, or by the whole of each man.

This Gospel deserves to be welcomed by every man, for it is fitted for every man, since it deals with the primary human characteristic of transgression. Brethren! we need different kinds of intellectual nutriment, according to education and culture. We need different kinds of treatment, according to condition and circumstance. The morality of one age is not the morality of another. Much, even of right and wrong, is local and temporary; but black man and white, savage and civilized, philosopher and fool, king and clown, all need the same air to breathe, the same water to drink, the same sun for light and warmth, and all need the same Christ for redemption from the same sin, for safety from the same danger, for snatching from the same death. This Gospel is a Gospel for the world, and for

every man in it. Have you taken it for yours? If it is "worthy of all acceptation," it is worthy of *your* acceptation. If you have not, you are treating Him and it with indignity, as if it was a worthless letter left in the post-office for you, which you knew was there, but which you did not think valuable enough to take the trouble to go for. The gift lies at your side. It is less than truth to say that it is "*worthy of being accepted.*" Oh! it is infinitely more than that.

It is, also, "worthy of all acceptation" in the sense of worthy of being accepted into all a man's nature, because it will fit it all and bless it all. Some of us give it a half welcome. We take it into our heads, and then we put a partition between them and our hearts, and keep our religion on the other side, so that it does not influence us at all. It is worthy of being received by the understanding, to which it will bring truth absolute; of being received by the will, to which it will bring the freedom of submission; of being received by the conscience, to which it will bring quickening; of being received by the affections, to which it will bring pure and perfect love. For hope, it will bring a certainty to gaze upon; for passions, a curb; for effort, a spur and a power; for desires, satisfaction; for the whole man, healing and light.

Brother! Take it. And, if you do, begin where it begins, with your sins; and be contented to be saved as a sinner in danger and sickness, who can neither defend nor heal yourself. And thus coming, you will test the rope and find it hold; you will take the medicine and know that it cures; and, by your own experience, you will be able to say, "*This is a faithful saying, Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.*"

## XIX.

### The Chief of Sinners.

“OF whom I am chief.”—1 TIM. i. 15.



THE less teachers of religion talk about themselves the better; and yet there is a kind of personal reference, far removed from egotism and offensiveness. Few such men have ever spoken more of themselves than Paul did, and yet none have been truer to his motto: “We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus.” For the scope of almost all his personal references is the depreciation of self, and the magnifying of the wonderful mercy which drew him to Jesus Christ. Whenever he speaks of his conversion it is with deep emotion and with burning cheeks. Here, for instance, he adduces himself as the typical example of God’s long-suffering. If *he* were saved, none need despair.

I take it that this saying of the Apostle’s, “Of whom I am chief,” paradoxical and exaggerated as it seems to many men, is in spirit that which all who know themselves ought to re-echo; and without which there is little strength in Christian life.

I.—And so I ask you to note, first, what this man thinks of himself,

“Of whom I am chief.” Now, if we set what we know of the character of Saul of Tarsus before he was a Christian by the side of that of many who have won a bad supremacy in wickedness, the words seem entirely strained and exaggerated. But, as I reminded you last Sunday, the principle of the Apostle’s estimate is to be found in his belief that, not the outward manifestation of evil in specific acts of immorality, or flagrant breaches of commandment, but the inward principle from which the deeds flowed, is the measure of a man’s criminality, and that, according to the uniform teaching of Scripture, the very root of sin, and that which is common to all the things that the world’s conscience and ordinary morality designate as wrong, is to be found here, that self has become the centre, the aim, and the law, instead of God. “This is the condemnation,” said Paul’s Master—“*not* that men have” done so-and so and so-and-so, but—“that light is come into the world, and men love darkness.” That is the root of evil. “When the Comforter is come,” said Paul’s Master, “He will convince the world of sin.” Because they have broken the commandments? Because they have been lustful, ambitious, passionate, murderous, profligate, and so on? No! “Because they believe not in Me.”

The common root of all sin is alienation of heart and will from God. And it is by the root, and not by the black clusters of poisonous berries that have come from it, that men are to be judged. Here is the mother-tincture. You may colour it in different ways, and you may flavour it with different essences, and you will get a whole *pharmacopœia* of poisons out of it.



But the mother-poison of them all is this, that men turn away from the Light, which is God; and for you and me is God in Christ.

So this man, looking back from the to-day of his present devotion and love to the yesterdays of his hostility, avails himself indeed of the palliation, "I did it ignorantly, in unbelief," but yet breaks down in the consciousness that whilst as touching the righteousness that is of the law he was blameless, his attitude to that incarnate love was such as now, he thinks, stamps him as the worst of men.

Brethren, *there* is the standard by which we have to try ourselves. If we get down below the mere surface of acts, and think, not of what we do, but of what we are, we shall then, at any rate, have in our hands the means by which we can truly estimate ourselves.

But what have we to say about that word "chief"? Is not that exaggeration? Well, yes and no. For every man ought to know the weak and evil places of his own heart better than he does those of any besides. And if he does so know them, he will understand that the ordinary classification of sin, according to the apparent blackness of the deed, is very superficial and misleading. Obviously the worst of acts need not be done by the worst of men. And it does not follow at all that the man who does the awful deed stands out from his fellows in the same bad pre-eminence in which his deed stands out from theirs.

Take a concrete case. Go into the slums of Manchester, and take some of the people there, battered almost out of the semblance of humanity, and all crusted over and leprous with foul-smelling evils that you and I never come within a thousand miles of

thinking it possible that we should do. Did you ever think that it is quite possible that the worst harlot, thief, drunkard, profligate in your back streets may be more innocent in their profligacy than you are in your respectability; and that we may even come to this paradox, that the worst the act, as a rule, the less guilty the doer? It is not such a paradox as it looks, because, on the one hand, the presence of temptation, and, on the other hand, the absence of light, make all the difference. And these people, who could not have been anything else, are innocent in degradation as compared with you, with all your education and culture, and opportunities of going straight, and knowledge of Christ and His love. The little transgressions that you do are far greater than the gross ones that they do. "But for the grace of God, there goes John Bradford," said the old preacher, when he saw a man going to the scaffold. And you and I, if we know ourselves, will not think that we have an instance of exaggeration, but only of the object nearest seeming the largest, when Paul said, "Of whom I am chief."

Only go and look for your sins in the way they look for Guy Fawkes at the House of Commons before the session. Take a dark lantern, and go down into the cellars. And if you do not find something there that will take all the conceit out of you, it must be because you are very shortsighted, or phenomenally self-complacent.

What does it matter though there be vineyards on the slopes of Vesuvius, and bright houses nestling at its base, and beauty lying all around like the dream of a god, if, when a man cranes his neck over the top of the crater, he sees that that cone, so graceful on the

outside, is seething with fire and sulphur? Let us look down into the crater of our own hearts, and what we see there may well make us feel as Paul did when he said, "Of whom I am chief."

Now, such an estimate is perfectly consistent with a clear recognition of any good that may be in the character and manifest in life. For the same Paul who says, "Of whom I am chief," says, in the almost contemporaneous letter sent to the same person, "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith." And he is the same man who asserted, "In nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing." The true Christian estimate of one's own evil and sin does not in the least interfere with the recognition of what God strengthens one to do, or of the progress which, by God's grace, may have been made in holiness and righteousness. The two things may lie side by side with perfect harmony, and ought to do so, in every Christian heart.

But notice one more point. The Apostle does not say "*I was*," but "*I am* chief." What! A man who could say, in another connection, "If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature; old things are passed away"—the man who could say, in another connection, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God"—does he also say "*I am* chief"? Is he speaking about his present? Are old sins bound round a man's neck for evermore? If they be, what is the meaning of the Gospel that Jesus Christ redeems us from our sin? Well, he means this. No lapse of time, nor any gift of Divine pardon,

nor any subsequent advancement in holiness and righteousness, can alter the fact that I, the very same *I* that am now rejoicing in God's salvation, am the man that did all these things; and, in a very profound sense, they remain mine through all eternity. I may be a forgiven sinner, and a cleansed sinner, and a sanctified sinner, but I *am* a sinner—not I *was*. The imperishable connection between a man and his past, which may be so tragical, and, thank God, may be so blessed, even in the case of remembered and confessed sin, is solemnly hinted at in the words before us. We carry with us ever the fact of past transgression, and no forgiveness, nor any future “perfecting of holiness in the fear” and by the grace “of the Lord,” can alter that fact. Therefore, let us beware lest we bring upon our souls any more of the stains which, though they be in a blessed and sufficient sense blotted out, do yet leave the marks where they have fallen for ever.

II.—Note how this man comes to such an estimate of himself.

He did not think so deeply and penitently of his past at the beginning of his career, true and deep as his repentance, and valid and genuine as his conversion were. But as he advanced in the love of Jesus Christ, his former active hostility became more monstrous to him, and the higher he rose, the clearer was his vision of the depth from which he had struggled; for growth in Christian holiness deepens the conviction of prior imperfection.

If God has forgiven my sin the more need for me to remember it. “Thou shalt be ashamed and confounded and never open thy mouth any more because of thy transgressions, when I am pacified towards thee

for all that thou hast done." If you, my brother, have any real and genuine hold of God's pardoning mercy, it will bow you down the more completely on your knees in the recognition of your own sin. The man who, as soon as the pressure of guilt and danger which is laid upon him seems to him to be lifted off, springs up like some elastic figure of indiarubber, and goes on his way in jaunty forgetfulness of his past evil, needs to ask himself whether he has ever passed from death unto life. Not to remember the old sin is to be blind. The surest sign that we are pardoned is the depth of our habitual penitence. Try yourselves, you Christian people who are so sure of your forgiveness—try yourselves by that test, and if you find that you are thinking less of your evil, be doubtful whether you have ever entered into the genuine possession of the forgiving mercy of your God.

And then, still further, this penitent retrospect is the direct result of advancement in Christian characteristics. We are drawn to begin some study or enterprise by the illusion that there is but a little way to go. "Alps upon alps arise" when once we have climbed a short distance up the hill, and it has become as difficult to go back as to go forward.

So it is in the Christian life—the sign of growing perfection is the growing consciousness of imperfection. A spot upon a clean palm is more conspicuous than a diffused grime over all the hand. One stain upon a white robe spoils it which would not be noticed upon one less lustrously clean. And so the more we grow towards God in Christ, and the more we appropriate and make our own His righteousness, the more we shall be conscious of our deficiencies,

and the less we shall be prepared to assert virtues for ourselves.

Thus it comes to pass that conscience is least sensitive when it is most needed, and most swift to act when it has least to do. So it comes to pass, too, that no man's acquittal of himself can be accepted as sufficient; and that he is a fool in self-knowledge who says, "I am not conscious of guilt, therefore I am innocent." "I know nothing against myself, yet am I not hereby justified: but He that judgeth me is the Lord." The more you get like Christ the more you will find out your unlikeness to Him.

III.—Lastly, note what this judgment of himself did for this man.

I said in the beginning of my remarks that it seemed to me that without the reproduction of this estimate of ourselves there would be little strong Christian life in us. It seems to me that that continual remembrance which Paul carried with him of what he had been, and of Christ's marvellous love in drawing him to Himself, was the very spring of all that was noble and conspicuously Christian in his career. And I venture to say, in two or three words, what I think you and I will never have unless we have this lowly self-estimate.

Without it there will be no intensity of cleaving to Jesus Christ. If you do not know that you are ill, you will not take the medicine. If you do not believe that the house is on fire, you will not mind the escape. The life-buoy lies unnoticed on the shelf above the berth as long as the sea is calm and everything goes well. Unless you have been down into the depths of your own heart, and seen the evil that is



there, you will not care for the redeeming Christ, nor will you grasp Him as a man does who knows that there is nothing between him and ruin except that strong hand. We must be driven to the Saviour as well as drawn to Him if there is to be any reality or tightness in the clutch with which we hold Him. And if you do not hold Him with a firm clutch you do not hold Him at all.

Further, without this lowly estimate there will be no fervour of grateful love. That is the reason why so much both of orthodox and heterodox religion amongst us to-day is such a tepid thing as it is. It is because men have never felt either that they need a Redeemer, or that Jesus Christ has redeemed them. I believe that there is only one power that will strike the rock of a human heart, and make the water of grateful devotion flow out, and that is the belief in Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of mankind, and as my Saviour—unless that be your faith, which it will not be except you have this conviction of my text in its spirit and essence, there will not be in your hearts the love which will glow there, an all-transforming power.

And is there anything in the world more obnoxious, more insipid, than lukewarm religion? If, with marks of quotation, I might use the coarse, strong expression of John Milton—"it gives a vomit to God Himself." "Because thou art neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."

And without it there will be little pity of, and love for, our fellows. Unless we feel the common evil, and estimate by the intensity of its working in ourselves how sad are its ravages in others, our charity to men

will be as tepid as our love to God. Did you ever notice that, historically, the widest benevolence to man goes along with what some people call the "narrowest" theology? People tell us, for instance, to mark the contrast between the theology which is usually called evangelical and the wide benevolence usually accompanying it, and ask how the two things agree. The "wide" benevolence comes directly from the "narrow" theology. He that knows the plague of his own heart, and how Christ has redeemed him, will go, with the pity of Christ in his heart, to help to redeem others.

So, dear friends, "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."



## A Test Case.

“HOWBEIT for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe.”—1 TIM. i. 16.



THE smallest of God's creatures, if it were only a gnat dancing in a sunbeam, has a right to have its well-being considered as an end of God's dealings. But no creature is so isolated or great as that it has a right to have its well-being regarded as the sole end of God's dealings. That is true about all His blessings and gifts; it is eminently true about His gift of salvation. He saves men because He loves them individually, and desires to make them blessed; but He also saves them because He desires that through them others shall be brought into the living knowledge of His love. It is most especially true about great religious teachers and guides.

Paul's humility is as manifest as his self-consciousness when he says in my text, "This is what I was saved for. Not merely, not even principally, for the blessings that thereby accrue to myself, but that in me, as a crucial instance, there should be manifested the whole fulness of the Divine love and saving

power." So he puts his own experience as giving no kind of honour or glory to himself, but as simply showing the grace and infinite love of Jesus Christ. Paul disappears as but a passive recipient ; and Christ strides into the front as the actor in his conversion and apostleship.

So we may take this point of view of my text, and look at the story of what befell the great Apostle as being in many different ways an exhibition of the great verities of the Gospel. I desire to signalize, especially, three points here. We see in it the demonstration of the life of Christ ; an exhibition of the love of the living Christ ; and a marvellous proof of the power of that loving and living Lord.

I.—First, then, take the experience of this Apostle as a demonstration of the exalted life, and continuous energy in the world, of Jesus Christ.

What was it that turned the brilliant young disciple of Gamaliel, the rising hope of the Pharisaic party, the hammer of the heretics, into one of themselves ? The appearance of Jesus Christ. Paul rode out of Jerusalem believing Him to be dead, and His Resurrection a lie. He staggered into Damascus, blind but seeing, and knowing that Jesus Christ lived and reigned. Now if you will let the man tell you himself what he saw, or thought he saw, you will come to this, that it was a visible, audible manifestation of a corporeal Christ. For it is extremely noteworthy that the Apostle ranks the appearance to himself, on the road to Damascus, as in the same class with the appearances to the other apostles which he enumerates in the great chapter in the Epistle to the Corinthians. He draws no distinction, as far as evi-

dential force goes, between the appearance to Simon and to the five hundred brethren and to the others, and that which flashed upon him and made a Christian of him. Other men that were with him saw the light. He saw the Christ within the blaze. Other men heard a noise ; he heard audible and intelligible words in his own speech. This is *his* account of the phenomenon. What do *you* think of his account ?

There are but three possible answers ! It was imposture ; it was delusion ; it was truth. The theory of imposture is out of court. "Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles ?" Such a life as followed is altogether incongruous with the notion that the man who lived it was a deceiver. A fanatic he may have been ; self-deceived he may have been ; but transparently sincere he undeniably was. It is not given to impostors to move the world, as Paul did and does.

Was it delusion ? Well it is a strange kind of hallucination which has such physical accompaniments and consequences as those in the story—not wanting confirmation from witnesses—which has come to us.

"At midday, O king"—in no darkness ; in no shut-up chamber, "at mid-day, O king—I heard . . . I saw . . ." "The men that were with me" partly shared in the vision. There was a lengthened conversation ; two senses at least were appealed to, vision and hearing, and in both vision and hearing there were partial participators. Physical consequences that lasted for three days accompanied the hallucination ; and the man "was blind, not seeing the sun, and neither did eat nor drink." There must be some soil beforehand in which delusions of such a sort can root themselves.

But, if we take the story in the Acts of the Apostles, there is not the smallest foothold for the fashionable notion, which is entirely due to men's dislike of the supernatural, that there was any kind of misgiving in the young Pharisee, springing from the influence of Stephen's martyrdom, as he went forth breathing out threatenings and slaughter. The plain fact is that, at one moment he hated Jesus Christ as a bad man, and believed that the story of the Resurrection was a gross falsehood; and that at the next moment he knew Him to be living and reigning, and the Lord of his life and of the world. Hallucinations do not come thus, like a thunderclap on unprepared minds. Nor is there anything in the subsequent history of the man that seems to confirm, but everything that contradicts, the idea that such a revolutionary change as upset all his mental furniture, and changed the whole current of his life, and slammed in his face the door that was wide open to advancement and reputation, came from a delusion.

I think the hallucination theory is out of court, too, and there is nothing left but the old-fashioned one, that what he said he saw, *he saw*, and did not fancy; and that which he said he heard, *he heard*; and that it was not a buzzing of a diseased nerve in his own ears, but the actual speech of the glorified Christ. Very well, then; if that be true, what then? The old-fashioned belief—Jesus who died on the Cross is living, Jesus who died on the Cross is glorified, Jesus who died on the Cross is exalted to the throne of the universe, puts His hand into the affairs of the world as a power amongst them. Paul's Christology is but the *rationale* of the vision that led to Paul's conver-



sion. It was in part because he "saw that" "Just One, and heard the words of His mouth," that he declares, "God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow." I do not say that the vision to Paul is a demonstration of the reality of the Resurrection, but I do say that it is a very strong confirmatory evidence, which the opponents of that truth will have much difficulty in legitimately putting aside.

II.—Secondly, let me ask you to consider how this man's experience is an exhibition of the love of the living Lord.

That is the main point on which the Apostle dwells in my text, in which he says that in him Jesus Christ "shows forth all long-suffering." The whole fulness of His patient, pitying grace was lavished upon him. He says this because he puts side by side his hostility and Christ's love, what he had believed of Jesus, and how Jesus had borne with him and loved him through all, and had drawn him to Himself and received him. So he established by his own experience this great truth, that the love of Jesus Christ is never darkened by one single speck of anger, that He "suffereth long, and is kind"; that He meets hostility with patient love, hatred with a larger outpouring of His affection and that His only answer to men's departures from Him in heart and feeling is more mightily to seek to draw them to Himself. "Long-suffering" means, in its true and proper sense, the patient acceptance, without the smallest movement of indignation, of unworthy treatment. And just as Christ on earth "gave His back to the smiter, and His cheeks to them that

pulled off the hair"; and let the lips of Judas touch His, "nor withdrew His face from shame and spitting"; and was never stirred to one impatient or angry word by all opposition, so now, and to us all, with equal boundlessness of endurance, He lets men hate Him, and revile Him, and forget Him, and turn their backs upon Him; and for only answer has, "Come unto Me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Oh, dear brethren, we can weary out all loves except one. By carelessness, rebelliousness, the opposition of indifference, we can chill the affection of those to whom we are dearest. "Can a mother forget? Yea, she may forget," but you cannot provoke Jesus Christ to cease His love. Some of you have been trying it all your days, but you have not done it yet. There does come a time when "the wrath of the Lamb"—which is a very terrible paradox—is kindled, and will fall, I fear, on some men and women that are listening now. But not yet. You cannot make Christ angry. "For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, *for a pattern*"—for the same long-suffering is extended to us all.

And then, in like manner, I may remind you that out of Paul's experience, as a cardinal instance and standing example of Christ's heart and dealings, comes the thought that that long-suffering is always wooing men to itself, and making efforts to draw them away from their own evil. In Paul's case there was a miracle. That difference is of small consequence. As truly as ever Christ spoke to Paul from the heavens, so truly, and so tenderly, does He speak to every one of us. He is drawing us all—you that

yield and you that do not yield to His attractions, by the kindest gifts of His love, by the revelations of His grace, by the movements of His Spirit, by the providences of our days, by even my poor lips addressing you now—for, if I be speaking His truth, it is not I that speak, but He that speaks in me. I beseech you, dear friends, recognize in this old story of the persecutor turned apostle nothing exceptional, though there be something miraculous, but only the exceptional form of manifestation of the normal activity of the love of Christ towards every soul. He loves, He draws, He welcomes all that come to Him. His servant, who stood over the blind, penitent persecutor, and said to him, "*Brother Saul!*" was only faintly echoing the glad reception which the elder Brother of the family gives to this and to every prodigal who comes back; because He Himself has drawn Him.

If we will only recognize the undying truth for all of us that lies beneath the individual experience of this apostle, we, too, may share in the attraction of His love, in the constraining and blessed influences of that love received, and in the welcome with which He hails us when we turn. If this man were thus dealt with, no man need despair.

III.—Lastly, we may notice how this experience is a manifestation of the power of the living, loving Lord.

The first and plainest thing that it teaches us about that power is that Jesus Christ is able in one moment to revolutionize a life. There is nothing more striking than the suddenness and completeness of the change which passed. "One day is with the Lord as a

thousand years"; and there come moments in every life into which there is crammed and condensed a whole world of experience, so as that a man looks back from this instant to that before, and feels that a gulf, deep as infinity, separates him from his old self.

Now, it is very unfashionable in these days to talk about conversion at all. It is even more unfashionable to talk about sudden conversions. I venture to say that there are types of character and experience which will never be turned to good, unless they are turned suddenly; while there are others, no doubt, to whom the course is a gradual one, and you cannot tell where the dawn broadens into perfect day. But, in the case of men who have grown up to some degree of maturity of life, either in sensuous sin or crusted over with selfish worldliness, or in any other way, by reason of intellectual pursuits, or other, have become forgetful of God and careless of religion—unless such men are in a moment arrested and wheeled round at once, there is very little chance of their ever being so at all.

I am sure I am speaking to some this morning who, unless the truth of Christ comes into their minds with arresting flash, and unless they are in one moment, into which an eternity is condensed, changed in their purposes, will never be changed.

Do not, my friend, listen to the talk that sudden conversion is impossible or unlikely. It is the only kind of conversion that some of you are capable of. I remember a man, one of the best Christian men in a humble station in life that I ever knew—he did not live in Manchester—he had been a drunkard up to his fortieth or fiftieth year. One day he was walking

across an open field, and a voice, as he thought, spoke to him and said, naming him, "If you don't sign the pledge to-day you will be damned!" He turned on his heel, and walked straight down the street to the house of a temperance friend, and said, "I have come to sign the pledge." He signed it, and from that day to the day of his death "adorned the doctrine of Jesus Christ" his Saviour. If that man had not been suddenly converted he would never have been converted. So I say that this story of the text is a crucial instance of Christ's power to lay hold upon a man, and wheel him right round all in a moment, and send him on a new path. He wants to do that with all of you to whom He has not already done it. I beseech you, do not stick your heels into the ground in resistance, nor when He puts His hand on your shoulder stiffen your back that He may not do what He desires with you.

May we not see here, too, a demonstration of Christ's power to make a life nobly and blessedly new, different from all its past, and adorned with strange and unexpected fruits of beauty and wisdom and holiness? This man's account of his future, from the moment of that incident on the Damascus road to the headsman's block outside the walls of Rome, is this: "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature;" "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." He will do that for us all; for long-suffering was shown on the Apostle for a pattern to them who should hereafter believe.

So, you Christian people, it is as much your business as it was Paul's to be visible rhetoric, manifest demonstrations in your lives of the truth of the

Gospel. Men ought to say about us, "There must be something in the religion that has done that for these people." We ought to be such that our characters shall induce the thought that the Christ that has made a man like that cannot be a figment. Do you show, Christian men, that you are grafted upon the true Vine by the abundance of the fruit that you bring forth? Can you venture to say, as Paul said, If you want to know what Jesus Christ's love and power are, look at me? Do not venture adducing of yourself as a specimen of His power unless you have a life like his to look back upon.

For us all the fountain to which Paul had recourse is open. Why do we draw so little from it? The fire which burned, refining and illuminating, in him may be kindled in all our hearts. Why are we so icy? His convictions are of some value, as subsidiary evidence to Gospel facts; his experience is of still more value as an attestation and an instance of Gospel blessings. Believe like Paul and you will be saved like Paul. Jesus Christ will show to you all long-suffering. For though Paul received it all he did not exhaust it, and the same long-suffering which was lavished on him is available for each of us. Only you too must say like him, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision."





## XXI.

### Christ's Remonstrances.

"AND when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."—ACTS xxvi. 14.

"AN the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" No!—But God can change the skin, because He can change the nature. In this story of the conversion of the Apostle Paul—the most important thing that happened that day—we have an instance of how brambles may become vines; tares may become wheat; and a hater of Jesus Christ may be changed in a moment into His lover and servant, and if need be His martyr.

Now, the very same motives and powers which were brought to bear upon the Apostle Paul by miracle are being brought to bear upon every one of us; and my object this evening is just to trace the stages of the process set forth here, and to ask some of you, if you, like Paul, have been "obedient to the heavenly vision." Stages, I call them, though they were all crowded into a moment, for even the lightning has to pass through the intervening space when it flashes from one side of the heavens to another; and we may divide its path

into periods. Time is very elastic, as any of us whose lives have held great sorrows, or great joys, or great resolutions well know.

I.—The first of these all but simultaneous and yet separable stages was the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Of course, to the Apostle it was mediated by miracle; but real as he believed that appearance of the risen Lord in the heavens to be, and valid as he maintained that it was, as the ground of his apostleship, he himself, in one of his letters, speaks of the whole incident as being the revelation of God's Son *in* him. The revelation in heart and mind was the main thing, of which the revelation to eye and ear were but means. The means, in his case, are different from those in ours; the end is the same. To Paul it came like the rush of a cataract, that the Christ whom he had thought of as lying in an unknown grave was living in the heavens, and ruling there. You and I, I suppose, do not need to be convinced by miracle of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but the bare fact that Jesus was living in the heavens would have had little effect upon Saul, unless it had been accompanied with the revelation of the startling fact that between him and Jesus Christ there were close personal relations, so that he had to do with Jesus, and Jesus with him.

"Saul! Saul! why persecutest thou Me?" They used to think that they could wake sleep-walkers by addressing them by name. Jesus Christ, by speaking his name to the Apostle, wakes him out of his diseased slumber, and brings him to wholesome consciousness. There are stringency and solemnity of address in that double use of the name "Saul! Saul!"

What does such an address teach you and me?

That Jesus Christ, the living, reigning Lord of the universe, has perfect knowledge of each of us, and that we each stand isolated before Him, as if all the light of omniscience was focussed upon us. He knows our characters; He knows all about us. And more than that, He directly addresses Himself to each man and woman in this congregation.

We are far too apt to hide ourselves in the crowd, and let all the messages of God's love, the warnings of His providences, as well as the teachings, and invitations, and pleadings of His Gospel, fly over our heads as if they were meant vaguely for anybody. But they are all intended for *thee*, as directly as if thou, and thou only, wert in the world. I beseech you, lay this to heart, that although no audible sounds may rend the silent heavens, nor any blaze might blind thine eye, yet that as really, though not in the same outward fashion, as Saul, when they were all fallen to the earth, felt himself to be singled out, and heard a voice "speaking to *him* in the Hebrew tongue, saying, Saul! Saul!" *thou* mayest hear a voice speaking to thee in the English tongue, by thy name, and directly addressing its gracious remonstrances and its loving offers to thy listening ear. I want to sharpen the blunt "whosoever" into the point "thou." And I would fain plead with each of my friends before me this evening to believe that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is meant for thee, and that Christ speaks to *thee*. "I have a message from God unto thee." "And Nathan said unto David, *Thou* art the man!"

Do not lose yourselves in the crowd, or hide yourselves from the personal incidence of Christ's offer, but feel that you stand, as you do indeed, alone the

hearer of His voice, the possible recipient of His saving mercy.

II.—Secondly, notice, as another stage in this process, the discovery of the true character of the Past.

“Why persecutest thou Me?” Now I am not going to be tempted from my more direct purpose this evening to dwell even for a moment on the beautiful, affecting, strengthening thought here, of the unity of Jesus Christ with all the humble souls that love Him, so as that whatsoever any member suffers the Head suffers with it. I must leave that altogether.

Saul was brought to look at all his past life as standing in immediate connection with Jesus Christ. Of course he knew before the vision that he had no love to Him whom he thought to be a Galilean impostor, and that the madness with which he hated the servants was only the glancing off of the arrow that he would fain have aimed at the Master. But he did not know that Jesus Christ counted every blow struck at one of His servants as being struck at Him. Above all, he did not know that the Christ whom he was persecuting was reigning in the heavens. And so his whole past life stood before him in a new aspect when it was brought into close connection with Christ, and looked at as in relation to Him.

The same process would yield very remarkable results if applied to our lives. If I could only get you, for one quiet ten minutes, to lay all your past, as far as memory brought it to your minds, right against that bright and loving face, I should have done much. One infallible way of judging of the rottenness or

goodness of our actions is that we should bring them where they will all be brought one day, into the brightness of Christ's countenance. If you want to find out the flaws in some thin, badly-woven piece of cloth, you hold it up against the light, do you not? and then you see all the specks and holes, and the irregular threads. Hold up your lives, in like fashion, against the light, and I shall be surprised if you do not find enough there to make you very much ashamed of yourselves. Were you ever on the stage of a theatre in the daytime? Did you ever see what miserable daubs the scenes look, and how seamy it all is when the pitiless sunshine comes in? Let that great light pour on your life, and be thankful if you find out what a daub it has been whilst yet paint and brushes and time are at your disposal, and you may make the future fairer than the past.

Again, this revelation of the past life disclosed its utter unreasonableness. That one question, "*Why persecutest thou Me?*" pulverized the whole thing. It was like the wondering question, so unanswerable in the psalm, "*Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?*" If you take into account what you are, and where you stand, you can find no reason, except utterly unreasonable ones, for the lives that I fear some of us are living—lives of Godlessness and Christlessness. There is nothing in all the world a tithe so stupid as sin. There is nothing so unreasonable, if there be a God at all, and if we depend upon Him, and have duties to Him, as the lives that some of you are living. You admit, most of you, that there is such a God; you admit, most of you, that you do hang upon Him; you admit, in

theory, that you ought to love and serve Him. The bulk of you call yourselves Christians. That is to say, you believe, as a piece of historical fact, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into this world and died for men. And, believing that, you turn your back on Him, and neither love nor serve nor trust Him, nor turn away from your iniquity. Is there anything outside a lunatic asylum more madlike than that? "Why persecutest thou?" "And he was speechless," for no answer was possible. Why neglectest thou? Why forgettest thou? Why, admitting what thou dost, art thou not an out-and-out Christian? If we think of all our obligations and relations, and the facts of the universe, we come to the old saying, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." And any man who, like many of my hearers, fails to give his heart and life to Jesus Christ will one day have to say, "Behold, I have played the fool, and erred exceedingly." Wake up, my brother, to apply calm reason to your lives while yet there is time, and face the question, *Why* dost thou stand as thou dost to Jesus Christ? There is nothing sadder than the small share that deliberate reason and intelligent choice have in the ordering of most men's lives. You live by impulse, by habit, by example, by constraint of the outward necessities of your position. But I am sure that there are many amongst us this evening who have very seldom, if ever, sat down and said, "Now, let me think until I get to the ultimate grounds of the course of life that I am pursuing." You can carry on the questions very gaily for a step or two, but then you come to a dead pause. "What do I do so-and-so for?" "Because I like it." "Why do



I like it?" "Because it meets my needs, or my desires, or my tastes, or my intellect." Why do you make the meeting of your needs, or your desires, or your tastes, or your intellect, your sole object? Is there any answer to that? The Hindoos say the world rests upon an elephant, and the elephant rests upon a tortoise. What does the tortoise rest on? Nothing! Then that is what the world and the elephant rest on. And so, though you may go bravely through the first stages of the examination, when you come to the last question of all you will find out that your whole scheme of life is built upon a blunder; and the blunder is this, that anybody can be blessed without God.

Further, this disclosure of the true character of his life revealed to Saul, as in a lightning flash, the ingratitude of it.

"Why persecutest thou Me?" That was as much as to say, "What have I done to merit thy hate? What have I *not* done to merit, rather, thy love?" Paul did not know all that Jesus Christ had done for him. It took him a lifetime to learn a little of it, and to tell his brethren something of what he had learned. And he has been learning it ever since that day when, outside the walls of Rome, they hacked off his head. He has been learning more and more of what Jesus Christ has done for him, and why he should not persecute, but love Him.

But the same appeal comes to each of us. What has Jesus Christ done for thee, my friend, for me, for every soul of man? He has loved me better than His own life. He has given Himself for me. He has lingered beside me, seeking to draw me to Himself,

and He still lingers. And this, at the best, tremulous faith ; this, at the warmest, tepid love ; this, at the completest, imperfect devotion and service are all that we bring to Him ; and some of us do not bring even these. Some of us have never known what it was to sacrifice one inclination for the sake of Christ, nor to do one act for His dear love's sake, nor to lean our weakness upon Him, nor to turn to Him and say, "I give Thee myself, that I may possess Thee." "Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise?" I have heard of wounded soldiers striking with their bayonets at the ambulance men who came to help them. That is like what some of you do to the Lord that died for your healing, and comes as the Physician, with bandages and with balm, to bind up the broken-hearted. "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?"

III.—Lastly, we have here a warning against self-inflicted wounds.

That second clause of the remonstrance on the lips of Christ in my text is, according to the true reading, not found in the account of Paul's conversion in the ninth chapter of this book. My text is from Paul's own story ; and it is interesting to notice that he adds this eminently pathetic and forcible appeal to the shorter account given by the writer of the book. It had gone deep into his heart, and he could not forget.

The metaphor is a very plain one. The ox-goad was a formidable weapon, some seven or eight feet in length, shod with an iron point, and capable of being used as a spear, and of inflicting deadly wounds at a pinch. Held in the firm hand of the ploughman, it presented a sharp point to the rebellious animal in the yoke. If the ox had readily yielded to the gentle

prick, given, not in anger, but for guidance, it had been well. But if it lashes out with its hoofs against the point, what does it get but bleeding flanks? Paul had been striking out instead of obeying, and he had won by it only bloody hocks.

There are two possible applications of that saying which may have been a proverb in common use. One is the utter futility of lives that are spent in opposing the Divine will. There is a great current running, and if you try to go against it you will only be swept away by it. Think of some little fishing coble coming across the bow of a great ocean-going steamer. What will be the end of that? Think of a pony-chaise jogging up the line, and an express train thundering down it. What will be the end of that? Think of a man lifting himself up and saying to God, "I will *not*!" when God says, "Do thou this!" or "Be thou this!" What will be the end of that? "The world passeth away, and the lusts thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks"—hard in regard of breaches of common morality, as some of my friends sitting quietly in these pews to-night very well know. It is hard to indulge in sensual sin. You cannot altogether dodge what people call the "natural consequences"; but it was God who made Nature; and so I call them God-inflicted penalties.

It is hard to set yourselves against Christianity. I am not going to talk about that at all to-night, only when we think of the jubilations over "victory" with which so many antagonists of the Cross have gaily leaped into the arena, and how the foes have been forgotten, and there stands the Cross still, we may

say of the whole crowd, beginning with the earliest, and coming down to the latest brand-new theory that is going to explode Christianity—"it is hard to kick against the pricks." Your own limbs you may wound; you will not do the good much harm.

But there is another side to the proverb of my text, and that is the self-inflicted harm that comes from resisting the pricks of God's rebukes and remonstrances, whether these be in conscience or by any other means; including, I make bold to say, even such poor words as mine to-night. For if the first little prick of conscience, a warning and a guide, be neglected, the next will go a great deal deeper. The voice which, before you do the wrong thing, says to you, "Do not do it," in tones of entreaty and remonstrance, speaks, after you have done it, more severely and more bitterly. The Latin word *remorse*, and the old English name for conscience, "again-bite"—which latter is a translation of the other—teach us the same lesson, that the gnawing which comes after wrong done is far harder to bear than the touch that should have kept us from the evil. The stings of marine jelly-fish will burn for days after, if you wet them. And so all wrong-doing, and all neglect of right-doing of every sort, carries with it a subsequent pain. Or else the wounded limb *mortifies*, and that is worse. There is no pain then; it would be better if there were. There is such a thing as having gone on so obstinately kicking against the pricks, and leaving the wounds so unheeded, as that they mortify and feeling goes. A conscience "seared with a hot iron" is ten times more dreadful than a conscience that pains and stings.

So, dear brethren, let me beseech you to listen to the pitying Christ, who says to us each, more in sorrow than in anger, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." It is no pleasure to Him to hold the goad, nor that we should wound ourselves upon it. He has another question to put to us, another "why." "Why should ye be stricken any more? Turn ye, turn ye: why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

There is another metaphor drawn from the employment of oxen which we may set side by side with this of my text: "Take My yoke upon you, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." The yoke accepted, the goad is laid aside; and repose and healing from its wounds is granted to us.

Dear brethren, if you will listen to that Christ revealed in the heavens, as knowing all about you, and remonstrating with you for your unreasonableness and ingratitude; and setting before you the miseries of rebellion and the suicide of sin, then you will have healing for all your wounds, and your lives will neither be self-tormenting, futile, nor unreasonable. The mercy of Jesus Christ lavished upon you makes your yielding yourselves to Him your only rational course. Anything else is folly beyond comparison and harm and loss beyond count.



## XXII.

### Our Strong City.

"IN that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah : We have a strong city ; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.

"Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in."—ISA. xxvi. 1, 2.



WHAT day is "that day"? The answer carries us back a couple of chapters, to the great picture drawn by the prophet of a world-wide judgment, which is followed by a burst of song from the ransomed people of Jehovah, like Miriam's chant by the shores of the Red Sea. The "city of confusion," the centre of the power hostile to God and man, falls ; and its fall is welcomed by a chorus of praises. The words of my text are the beginning of one of these songs. Whether or not there were any historical event which floated before the prophet's mind is wholly uncertain. If there were a smaller judgment upon some city of the enemy, it passes in his view into a world-wide judgment ; and my text is purely ideal, imaginative, and apocalyptic. Its nearest ally is the similar vision of the Book of the Revelation, where, when Babylon sank with a splash like a millstone in the stream, the ransomed people raised their praises.



So, then, whatever may have been the immediate horizon of the prophet, and though there may have stood in it some historical event, the city which he sees falling is other than any material Babylon, and the strong city in which he rejoices is other than the material Jerusalem, though it may have suggested the metaphor of my text. The song fits our lips quite as closely as it did the lips from which it first sprang, thrilling with triumph. "We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in."

There are three things, then, here; the city, its defences, its citizens.

#### I.—The City.

Now, no doubt the prophet was thinking of the literal Jerusalem, but the city is ideal, as is shown by the bulwarks which defend, and by the qualifications which permit entrance. And so we must pass beyond the literalities of Palestine, and, as I think, must not apply the symbol to any visible institution or organisation if we are to come to the depth and greatness of the meaning of these words. No church which is organised amongst men can be the New Testament representation of this strong city. And if the explanation is to be looked for in that direction at all, it can only be the invisible aggregate of ransomed souls which is regarded as being the Zion of the prophecy.

But perhaps even that is too definite and hard. And we are rather to think of the unseen but existent order of things or polity to which men here on earth may belong, and which will one day, after shocks

and convulsions that shatter all which is merely institutional and human, be manifested still more gloriously.

The central thought that was moving in the prophet's mind is that of the indestructible vitality of the true Israel, and the order which it represented, of which Jerusalem on its rock was but to him a symbol. And thus for us the lesson is that, apart altogether from the existing and visible order of things in which we dwell, there is a polity to which we may belong, for "ye are come unto Mount Zion, the city of the living God," and that order is indestructible. Convulsions come, every Babylon falls, all human institutions change and pass. "The kingdoms old" are "cast into another mould." But persistent through them all, and, at the last, high above them all, will stand the stable polity of Heaven, "the city which hath the foundations."

*There* is a lesson for us, brethren, in times of fluctuation, of change of opinion, of shaking of institutions, and of new social, economical, and political questions, threatening day by day to reorganize society. "We have a strong city"; and whatever may come—and much destructive will come, and much that is venerable and antique, rooted in men's prejudices, and having survived through and oppressed the centuries, much will have to go, but—God's polity, His form of human society, of which the perfect ideal and antitype, so to speak, lies concealed in the heavens, is everlasting. Therefore, whatsoever changes, whatsoever ancient and venerable things come to be regarded as of no account, howsoever the nations, like clay in the hands of the

potter, may have to assume new forms, as certainly they will, yet the foundation of God standeth sure. And for Christian men in revolutionary epochs, whether these revolutions affect the forms in which truth is grasped, or whether they affect the moulds into which society is run, the only worthy temper is the calm, triumphant expectation that through all the dust, contradiction, and distraction, the fair city of God will be brought nearer and made more manifest to man. Isaiah, or whoever was the writer of these great words of my text, stayed his own and his people's hearts in a time of confusion and distress by the thought that it was only Babylon that could fall, and Jerusalem was the possessor of a charmed, immortal life.

This strong city, the order of human society which God had appointed, and which exists, though it be hidden in the heavens, will be manifested one day when, like the fair vision of the goddess rising from amidst the ocean's foam, and shedding peace and beauty over the charmed waves, there shall emerge from all the wild confusion and tossing billows of the sea of the peoples the fair form of the "Bride, the Lamb's wife." There shall be an apocalypse of the city, and whether the old words which catch up the spirit of my text, and speak of that Holy City as "descending from heaven" upon earth, at the close of the history of the world, are to be taken, as perhaps they are, as expressive of the truth that a renewed earth is to be the dwelling of the ransomed or no, this at least is clear, that the city shall be revealed, and when Babylon is swept away, Zion shall stand.

To this city—existent immortal, and waiting to be

revealed—you and I may belong to-day. “We *have* a strong city.” You may lay hold of life either by the side of it which is transient and trivial and contemptible, or by the side of it which goes down through all the mutable and lays hold of eternity. As in some sea-weed, far out in the depths of the ocean, the tiny frond that floats upon the billow goes down and down and down, by filaments that knit it to the basal rock, so the most insignificant act of our fleeting days has a hold upon eternity, and life in all its moments may be knit to the permanent. We may unite our lives with the surface of time or with the centre of eternity. Though we dwell in tabernacles, we may still be “come to Mount Zion,” and all life be awful, noble, solemn, religious, because it is all connected with the unseen city across the seas. It is for us to determine to which of these orders—the perishable, noisy and intrusive and persistent in its appeals, or the calm, silent, most real, eternal order beyond the stars—our petty lives shall attach themselves.

II.—Now, note, secondly, the defences.

“Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.” This “evangelical prophet,” as he has been called, is distinguished, not only by the clearness of his anticipations of Jesus Christ and His work, but by the fulness and depth which he attaches to that word “salvation.” He all but anticipates the New Testament completeness and fulness of meaning, and lifts it from all merely material associations of earthly or transitory deliverance into the sphere in which we are accustomed to regard it as especially moving. By “salvation,” he means and we mean, not only negative

but positive blessings. Negatively it includes the removal of every conceivable or endurable evil, "all the ills that flesh is heir to," whether they be evils of sin or evils of sorrow; and, positively, the investiture with every possible good that humanity is capable of, whether it be good of goodness or good of happiness. This is what the prophet tells us is the wall and bulwark of his ideal-real city.

Mark the eloquent omission of the name of the builder of the wall. "God" is a supplement. Salvation "will *He* appoint for walls and bulwarks." No need to say who it is that flings such a fortification around the city. There is only one hand that can trace the lines of such walls; only one hand that can pile their stones; only one that can lay them, as the walls of Jericho were laid, in the blood of His first-born Son. "Salvation will He appoint for walls and bulwarks." That is to say in a highly imaginative and picturesque form, that the defence of the city is God Himself; and it is substantially a parallel with other words which speak about Him as being "a wall of fire round about it, and the glory in the midst of it." Whom He means to keep safe are kept safe. Whom the operations of His mighty hand preserve are preserved. The fact of salvation is the wall and the bulwark. And the consciousness of the fact, and the sense of possessing it, is for our poor hearts one of our best defences against both the evil of sin and the evil of sorrow. For nothing so robs temptation of its power, and so lightens the pressure of calamities, and draws the poison from the fangs of sin and sorrow, as the assurance that the loving purpose of God to save grasps and keeps us. They who shelter behind that

wall, and feel that between them and sin, and them and sorrow, there rises the inexpugnable defence of an Almighty purpose and power to save, lie safe whatever betides. There is no need of other defences. Zion

“Needs no bulwarks,  
No towers along the steep.”

God Himself is the shield, and none other is required.

So, brethren, let us walk by the faith that is always confident, though it depends on an unseen hand. It is a grand thing to be able to stand, as it were, in the open, a mark for all “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,” and yet to feel that around us there are walls most real, though invisible, which permit no harm to come to us. Our feeble sense-bound souls much prefer a visible wall. We like a handrail on the stair. Though it does not at all guard the descent it keeps our heads from getting dizzy. It is hard for us, as some travellers may have to do, to walk with steady foot and unthrobbed heart along a narrow ledge of rock with beetling precipice above us and black depths beneath, and we would like a little bit of a wall of some sort, for imagination if not for reality, between us and the sheer descent. But it is blessed to learn that naked we are clothed, solitary we have a Companion, and unarmed we have our defenceless heads covered with the shadow of the great wing, which, though sense sees it not, faith knows is there. A servant of God is never without a friend, and when most unsheltered

“From marge to blue marge  
The whole sky grows his targe  
With sun’s self for visible boss,”

beneath which he lies safe.



“Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks,” and if we realise, as we ought to do, His purpose to keep us safe, and His power to keep us safe, and the actual operation of His hand keeping us safe at every moment, we shall not ask that these defences shall be supplemented by the poor feeble earthworks that sense can throw up.

III.—Lastly, note the citizens.

Our text is part of a “song,” and is not to be interpreted in the cold-blooded fashion that might suit prose. A voice, coming from whom we know not, breaks in upon the first strain with a command, addressed to whom we know not—“Open ye the gates”—the city thus far being supposed to be empty—“that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in.” The central idea there is just this, “Thy people shall be all righteous.” The one qualification for entrance into the city is absolute purity.

Now, brethren, that is true in regard of our present imperfect denizenship within the city; and it is true in regard to men’s passing into it, in its perfect and final form. As to the former, there is nothing that you Christian people need more to have dinned into you than this, that your continuance in the state of a redeemed man, with all the security and blessing that attach thereto, depends upon your continuing to be righteous. Every sin, every flaw, every dropping beneath our own standard in conscience of what we ought to be has for its inevitable result that we are cast out for the time being, from consciousness of the walls of the city being about us and of our being citizens thereof. “Who shall ascend into the hill of

the Lord? And who shall stand in His holy place?" The New Testament, as emphatically as the old psalm, answers "He that hath clean hands and a pure heart." "Let no man deceive you. He that doeth righteousness is righteous." There is no way by which Christian men here on earth can pass into and keep within the city of the living God except they possess personal purity, righteousness of life, and cleanness of heart.

They used to say that Venice glass was so made that any poison poured into it shivered the vessel. Any drop of sin poured into your cup of communion with God shatters the cup and spills the wine. Whosoever thinks himself a citizen of that great city, if he falls into transgression, and soils the cleanness of his hands, and ruffles the calm of his pure heart by self-willed sinfulness, will wake to find himself not within the battlements, but lying wounded, robbed, solitary, in the pitiless desert. My brother! it is "the righteous nation" that "enters in," even here on earth.

I do not need to remind you how, admittedly by us all, that is the case in regard to the final form of the city of our God into which nothing shall enter "that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie." Heaven can only be entered into hereafter by, as here and now it can only enter into, those who are pure of heart. All else there would shrivel as foul things born in the darkness do in the light, and be consumed in the fire. None but the pure can enter and see God.

"The nation which keepeth the truth"—that does not mean adherence to any revelation, or true creed,

or the like. The word which is employed means, not truth of thought, but truth of character; and might, perhaps, be better represented by the more familiar word in such a connection, "faithfulness." A man who is true to God, that keeps up a faithful relation to Him who is faithful to us, he, and only he, will tread and abide in the city.

Now, brethren, so far our text carries us, but no further; unless, perhaps, there may be a hint of something yet deeper in the next clause of this song. If anybody asks how does the nation become righteous, the answer may lie in the immediately following exhortation:—"Trust ye in the Lord for ever." But whether that be so or not, if we want an answer to the questions, How can my stained feet be cleansed so as to be fit to tread the crystal pavements? how can my foul garments be so purged as not to be a blot and an eyesore amidst the white lustrous robes that sweep along them, and gather no defilement there? the only answer that I know of is to be found by turning to the final visions of the New Testament, where the spirit of this whole section of our prophet is reproduced. Again Babylon falls amidst the songs of saints; and then, down upon all the dust and confusion of the crash of ruin, the seer beholds the Lamb's wife, the new Jerusalem, descending from above. To his happy eyes its glories are unveiled, its golden streets, its open gates, its walls of precious stones, its flashing river, its peaceful inhabitants, its light streaming from the throne of God and of the Lamb. And when that vision passes, his last message to us is, "Blessed are they that wash their robes that they may enter through the gates into the city."

None but those who wash their garments, and make them white in the blood of the Lamb, can, living, come unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem; or, dying, can pass through the iron gate that opens to them of its own accord, and find themselves as day breaks in the street of the Jerusalem which is above.



## XXIII.

### The Inhabitant of the Rock.

“THOU wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee ; because he trusteth in Thee.

“Trust ye in the Lord for ever ; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.”—ISAIAH xxvi. 3-4.



HERE is an obvious parallel between these verses and the two preceding ones which occupied us in the last sermon. The safety which was there set forth as the result of dwelling in the strong city is here presented as the consequence of trust. The emblem of the fortified place passes into that of the Rock of Ages. There is the further resemblance in form, that, just as in the two preceding verses we had the triumphant declaration of security, followed by a summons to some unknown persons to “open the gates,” so here we have the triumphant declaration of perfect peace, followed by a summons to all, to “trust in the Lord for ever.” If we may suppose the invocation of the preceding verses to be addressed to the watchers at the gate of the strong city, it is perhaps not too fanciful to suppose that the invitation in my text is the watchers’ answer, pointing the way by which men may pass into the city.

Whether that be so or no, at all events I take it as by no means accidental that immediately upon the statement of the Old Testament law that righteousness alone admits to the presence of God, there follow so clear and emphatic an anticipation of the great New Testament Gospel that faith is the condition of righteousness, and that immediately after hearing that only "the righteous nation which keepeth the truth" can enter there, we hear the merciful call "Trust ye in the Lord for ever." So, then, I think we have in the words before us, though not formally yet really, very large teaching as to the nature, the objects, the blessed effects, and the universal duty of that trust in the Lord which makes the very nexus between man and God, according to the teaching of the New Testament.

I.—First, then, I desire to notice in a sentence the insight into the true nature of trust or faith given by the word employed here.

Now the literal meaning of the expression here rendered "to trust" is to lean upon anything. As we say, trust is reliance. As a weak man might stay his faltering tottering steps upon some strong staff, or might lean upon the outstretched arm of a friend, so we, conscious of our weakness, aware of our faltering feet, and realizing the roughness of the road, and the smallness of our strength, may lay the whole weight of ourselves upon the loving strength of Jehovah. And that is the trust of the Old Testament, the faith of the New—the simple act of reliance going out of myself to find the basis of my being, forsaking myself to touch and rest upon the ground of my security, passing from my own weakness and laying my



trembling hand in the strong hand of God, like some weak-handed youth on a coach-box who turns to a stronger beside him and says: "Take thou the reins, for I am feeble to direct or to restrain." Trust is reliance, and reliance is always blessedness.

II.—Notice, secondly, the steadfast peacefulness of trust.

Now there are difficulties about the rendering and precise significance of the first verse of my text with which I do not need to trouble you. The Authorized Version, and still more, perhaps, the Revised Version, gives substantially, as I take it, the prophet's meaning; and the margin of the Revised Version is still more literal and accurate than the text, "The steadfast mind Thou wilt keep in peace, because it trusteth in Thee." If this, then, be the true meaning of the words, you observe that it is the steadfast mind, steadfast because it trusts, which God keeps in the deep peace that is expressed by the reduplication of the word.

And if we break up that complex thought into its elements, it just comes to this, first, that trust makes steadfastness. Most men's lives are blown about by winds of circumstance, directed by gusts of passion, shaped by accidents, and are fragmentary and jerky, like some ship at sea with nobody at the helm, heading here and there, as the force of the wind or the flow of the current may carry them. If my life is to be steadied, there must not only be a strong hand at the tiller, but some outward object which shall be for me the point of aim and the point of rest. No man can steady his life except by clinging to a holdfast without himself. Some of us look for that stay in the fluctua-

tions and fleetingnesses of creatures; and some of us are wiser and saner, and look for it in the steadfastness of the unchanging God. The men who do the former are the sport of circumstances, and the slaves of their own natures, and there is no consistency of noble aim and effort throughout their lives, corresponding to their circumstances, relations, and nature. Only they who stay themselves upon God, and get down through all the superficial shifting strata of drift and gravel to the base-rock, are steadfast and solid.

My brother, if you want to govern yourself you must let God govern you. If you want to be firm you must draw your firmness from the unchangingness of that Divine nature which you grasp. How can a willow be stiffened into an iron pillar? Only—if I might use such a violent metaphor—when it receives into its substance the iron particles that it draws from the soil in which it is rooted. How can a bit of thistledown be kept motionless amidst the tempest? Only by being glued to something that is fixed. What do men do with light things on deck when the ship is pitching? Lash them to a fixed point. Lash yourselves to God by simple trust, and then you will partake of His serene immutability in such fashion as it is possible for the creature to participate in the attributes of the Creator.

And then, still further, the steadfast mind—steadfast because it trusts—is rewarded in that it is kept of God. It is no mere mistake in the order of his thought which leads this prophet to allege that it is the steadfast mind which God keeps. For, though it be true, on the one hand, that the real fixity and

solidity of a human character come more surely and fully through trust in God than by any other means, on the other hand, it is true that, in order to receive the full blessed effects of trust into our characters and lives, we must persistently and doggedly keep on in the attitude of confidence. If a man holds out to God a tremulous hand with a shaking cup in it, which he sometimes presents and sometimes twitches back, it is not to be expected that God will pour the treasure of His grace into such a vessel, with the risk of most of it being spilt upon the ground. There must be a steadfast waiting if there is to be a continual flow.

It is the mind that cleaves to God which God keeps. I suppose that there was floating before Paul's thoughts some remembrance of this great passage of the evangelical prophet when he uttered his words, which ring so curiously with so many echoes of them, when he said, "The peace of God which passeth understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." It is the steadfast mind that is kept in perfect peace. If we "keep ourselves," by that Divine help which is always waiting to be given, "in the" faith and "love of God," He will keep us in the hour of temptation, will keep us from falling, and will garrison our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

And then, still further, this faithful, steadfast heart and mind, kept by God, is a mind filled with deepest peace. There is something very beautiful in the prophet's abandoning the attempt to find any adjective of quality which adequately characterizes the peace of which he has been speaking. He falls back upon an expedient which is a confession of the

impotence of human speech worthily to portray its subject when he simply says, "Thou shalt keep in peace, peace . . . because he trusteth in Thee." The reduplication expresses the depth and completeness of the tranquillity which flows into the heart. Such continuity, wave after wave, or rather ripple after ripple, is possible even for us. For, dear brethren, the possession of this deep, unbroken peace does not depend on the absence of conflict, or of distraction, trouble, or sorrow, but on the presence of God. If we are in touch with Him, then our troubled days may be calm, and beneath all the surface tumult there may be a centre of rest. A man in some high hill-fortress looks down upon the open where the enemy's ranks are crawling like insects across the grass, and he scarcely hears the noise of the tumult, and no arrow can reach his lofty hold. So up in God we may dwell at rest whate'er betide. Strange that we should prefer to live down amongst the unwall'd villages, which every spoiler can harry and burn, when we might climb, and by the night and the magic of trust in the Lord, bring round about ourselves a wall of fire which shall burn the poison out of the evil, even whilst it permits the sorrow to do its beneficent work upon us.

III.—So, note again the worthiness of the Divine name to evoke, and the power of the Divine character to reward, the trust.

We pass to the last words of my text:—"In the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength."

Now I suppose we all know that the words feebly rendered in the Authorized Version "everlasting strength" are literally "the Rock of Ages"; and that

this verse is the source of that hallowed figure which, by one of the greatest of our English hymns, is made familiar and immortal to all English-speaking people.

But there is another peculiarity about the words on which I dwell for a moment, and that is that here we have, for one of the only two times in which the expression occurs in Scripture, the great name of Jehovah reduplicated. "In Jah Jehovah is the Rock of Ages." In the former verse the prophet had given up in despair the attempt to characterize the peace which God gave, and fallen back upon the expedient of naming it twice over. In this verse, with similar eloquence of reticence, he abandons the attempt to describe or characterize that great name, and once more, in adoration, contents himself with twice taking it upon his lips, in order to *impress* what he cannot *express*, the majesty and the sufficiency of that name.

What, then, is the force of that name? We do not need, I suppose, to do more than simply remind you that there are two great thoughts communicated by that self-revelation of God which lies in it. *Jehovah*, in its literal grammatical signification, puts emphasis upon the absolute, underived, and therefore unlimited, unconditioned, unchangeable, eternal being of God. "I AM THAT I AM." Men and creatures are what they are made, are what they become, and some time or other cease to be what they were. But God is what He is, and is because He is. He is the Source, the Motive, the Law, the Sustenance of His own Being; and changeless and eternal He is for ever. In that name is the Rock of Ages.

That mighty Name, by its place in the history of Revelation, conveys to us still further thoughts, for it is

the Name of the God who entered into covenant with His ancient people, and remains bound by His covenant to bless us. That is to say, He hath not left us in darkness as to the methods and purpose of His dealings with us, or as to the attitude of His heart towards us. He has bound Himself by solemn words, and by deeds as revealing as words. So we can reckon on God. To use a vulgarism which is stripped of its vulgarity if employed reverently, as I would do it—we know where to have Him. He has given us the elements to calculate His orbit; and we are sure that the calculation will come right. So, because the Name flashes upon men the thought of an absolute Being, eternal, and all-sufficient, and self-modified, and changeless, and because it reveals to us the very inmost heart of the mystery, and makes it possible for us to forecast the movements of this great Sun of our heavens, therefore in the name “Jah Jehovah is the Rock of Ages.”

The metaphor needs no expansion. We understand that it conveys the idea of unchangeable defence. As the cliff's tower above the river that swirls at their base, and takes centuries to eat the faintest line upon their shining surface, so the changeless God rises above the stream of time, of which the brief breakers are human lives, “sparkling, bursting, borne away.” They who fasten themselves to that Rock are safe in its unchangeable strength. God the Unchangeable is the amulet against any change that is not growth in the lives of those who trust Him. Some of us may recall some great precipice rising above the foliage, which stands to-day as it did when we were boys, unwasted in its silent strength, while generations of



leaves have opened and withered at its base, and we have passed from childhood to age. Thus, unaffected by the transiency that changes all beneath, God rises the Rock of Ages in whom we may trust. "The conies are a feeble folk, but they make their houses in the rocks." So our weakness may house itself there and be at rest.

IV.—Lastly, note the summons to trust.

We know not whose voice it is that is heard in the last words of my text, but we know to whose ears it is addressed. It is to all. "Trust ye in the Lord for ever."

Surely, surely the blessed effects of trust, of which we have been speaking, have a voice of merciful invitation summoning us to exercise it. The promise of peace appeals to the deepest, though often neglected and misunderstood, longings of the human heart. "Inly we sigh for that repose." Oh! dear brethren, if it be true that into our agitated and struggling lives there may steal, and in them there may abide, this priceless blessing of a great tranquillity, surely nothing else should be needed to woo us to accept the conditions and put forth the trust. It is strange that we should turn away, as we are all tempted to do, from that rest in God, and try to find repose in what was only meant for stimulus, and is altogether incapable of imparting calm. Storms live in the lower regions of the atmosphere; get up higher and there is peace. Waves dash and break on the surface region of the ocean; get down deeper, nearer the heart of things, and again there is peace.

Surely the name of the Rock of Ages is an invitation to us to put our trust in Him. If a man knew

God as He is, he could not choose but trust Him. It is because we have blackened His face with our own doubts, and darkened His character with the mists that rise from our own sinful hearts, that we have made that bright sun in the heavens, which ought to fall upon our hearts with healing in its beams, into a lurid ball of fire that shines threatening through the dim obscurity of our misty hearts. But if we knew Him we should love Him, and if we would only listen to His own self-revelation we should find that He draws us to Himself by the manifestation of Himself, as the sun binds all the planets to his mass and his flame by the irradiation of his own mystic energies.

The summons is a summons to a faith corresponding to that upon which it is built. Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord is the strength that endures for ever. Our continual faith is the only fit response to His unchanging faithfulness. Build rock upon rock.

The summons is a summons addressed to us all. "Trust ye"—whoever ye are—"in the Lord for ever." You and I, dear friends, hear the summons in a yet more beseeching and tender voice than was audible to the prophet, for our faith has a nobler object, and may have a mightier operation, seeing that its object is "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world"; and its operation, to bring to us peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. When from the cross there comes to all our hearts the merciful invitation, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," why should not we each answer,

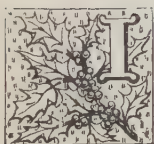
"Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee?"

## The Servant and the Slaves.

"THY servant David. . . ."

"Thy holy servant Jesus. . . ."

"Thy servants."—ACTS iv. 25, 27, 29.



DO not often take fragments of Scripture for a text; but though these are fragments, their juxtaposition results in by no means fragmentary thoughts. There is obvious intention in the recurrence of the expression so frequently in so few verses, and to the elucidation of that intention my remarks will be directed. The words are parts of the Church's prayer on the occasion of its first collision with the civil power. The incident is recorded at full length because it *is* the first of a long and bloody series, in order that succeeding generations might learn their true weapon and their sure defence. Prayer is the right answer to the world's hostility, and they who only ask for courage to stand by their confession will never ask in vain. But it is no part of my intention to deal either with the incident or with this noble prayer.

A word or two of explanation may be necessary as

to the language of our texts. You will observe that, in the second of them, I have followed the *Revised Version*, which, instead of "Thy holy child," as in the *Authorized Version*, reads "Thy holy servant." The alteration is clearly correct. The word, indeed, literally means "a child," but, like our own English "boy," or even "man," or "maid," it is used to express the relation of servant, when the desire is to cover over the harsher features of servitude, and to represent the servant as a part of the family. Thus the kindly centurion, who besought Jesus to come and heal his servant, speaks of him as his "boy." And that the word is here used in this secondary sense of "servant" is unmistakable. For there is no discernible reason why, if stress were meant to be laid on Christ as being the Son of God, the recognized expression for that relationship should not have been employed. Again, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, with which the Apostles were familiar, employs the very phrase that is here used as its translation of the well-known Old Testament designation of the Messiah, "the servant of the Lord," and the words here are really a quotation from the great prophecies of the second part of the Book of Isaiah. Further, the same word is employed in reference to King David and in reference to Jesus Christ. In regard to the former, it is evident that it must have the meaning of "servant"; and it would be too harsh to suppose that in the compass of so few verses the same expression should be employed, at one time in the one signification, and at another in the other. So, then, David and Jesus are in some sense classified here together as both

servants of God. That is the first point that I want to make.

Then, in regard to the third of my texts, the expression is not the same as in the other two. The disciples do not venture to use the loftier designation. Rather they take the humble one, "slave," bondman the familiar expression found all through the New Testament in regard to Christians.

So, then, we have here three figures, the Psalmist-king, the Messiah, the disciples. Christ in the midst, on the one hand a servant with whom He consents to be classed, on the other hand the slaves who, through Him, have become sons. And I think I shall best bring out the intended lessons of these clauses in their connection if I ask you to note these two contrasts, the servants and *the* Servant; the Servant and the slaves. "David Thy servant"; "Thy holy servant Jesus"; us "Thy servants."

I.—First, then, notice the servants and the Servant.

The reason for the application of the name to the Psalmist lies, not so much in his personal character, or in his religious elevation, as in the fact that he is chosen of God for a specific purpose, to carry on the Divine plans some steps towards their realization. Kings, priests, prophets, the collective Israel, as having a specific function in the world, and being, in some sense, the instruments and embodiments of the will of God amongst men, have in an eminent degree the designation of His "servants." And we might widen out the thought and say that all men who, like the heathen Cyrus, are God's shepherds, though they do not know it—guided by Him, though they under-

stand not whence comes their power, and blindly do His work in the world, being "epoch-making" men, as the fashionable phrase goes now—are really, though in a subordinate sense, entitled to the designation.

But then, whilst this is true, and whilst Jesus Christ comes into this category, and is one of these special men raised up and adapted for special service in connection with the carrying out of the Divine purpose, mark how emphatically and broadly the line is drawn here between Him and the other members of the class to which, in a certain sense, He does belong. Peter says, "Thy servant David," but he says, "Thy *holy* servant Jesus." And in the Greek the emphasis is still stronger, because the definite article is employed before the word "servant." "*The* holy servant of Thine"—that is His specific and unique designation.

There are many imperfect instruments of the Divine will. Thinkers and heroes and saints and statesmen and warriors, as well as prophets and priests and kings, are so regarded in Scripture, and may profitably be so regarded by us; but amongst them all there is One who stands in their midst and yet apart from them, because He, and He alone, can say, "I have done all Thy pleasure," and into My doing of Thy pleasure no bitter leaven of self-regard or by-ends has ever, in the faintest degree, entered. "Thy holy servant Jesus" is the unique designation of *the* Servant of the Lord.

And what is the meaning of holy? The word does not originally and primarily refer to character so much as to relation to God. The root idea of holiness



is not righteousness nor moral perfectness, but something that lies behind that—viz., separation for the service and uses of God. The first notion of the word is consecration, and, built upon that and resulting from it, moral perfection. So then these men, some of whom had lived beside Jesus Christ for all those years, and had seen everything that He did, and studied Him through and through, had summered and wintered with Him, came away from the close inspection of His character with this thought: He is utterly and entirely devoted to the service of God, and in Him there is neither spot nor wrinkle nor blemish such as is found in all other men.

I need not remind you with what strange persistence of affirmation, and yet with what humility of self-consciousness, our Lord Himself always claimed to be in possession of this entire consecration, and complete obedience, and consequent perfection. Think of human lips saying, "I do always the things that please Him"! Think of human lips saying, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me"! Think of a man whose whole life's secret was summed up in this: "As the Father hath given me commandments, so"—no more, no less, no otherwise—"so I speak"! Think of a man whose inspiring principle was, consciously to himself, "not my will but Thine be done"; and who could say that it was so, and not be met by universal ridicule! There followed in Jesus the moral perfectness that comes from such uninterrupted and complete consecration of self to God. "Thy servant David." What about Bathsheba, David? What about a great many other things in your life? The poet-

king, with the poet-nature so sensitive to all the delights of sense, and so easily moved in the matter of pleasure, is but the type of all other servants in the fact of imperfection. In every machine power is lost through friction; and in every man, the noblest and the purest, there is resistance to be overcome ere motion, in conformity with the Divine impulse, can be secured. We pass in review before our minds saints and martyrs and lovely characters by the hundred, and amongst them all there is not a jewel without a flaw, not a mirror without some dint in it where the rays are distorted, or some dark place where the reflecting surface has been rubbed away by the attrition of sin, and there is no reflection of the Divine light. And then we turn to that meek figure that stands there with the question that has been awaiting an answer for eighteen centuries upon His lips, and is unanswered yet: "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?" "The holy servant," whose consecration and character mark Him off from all the class to which He belongs as the only one of them all who, in His fulness, has executed the Father's purpose, and has never attempted anything besides!

Now there is another step to take, and that is this. The servant who stands out in front of all the group—though the noblest names in the world's history are included there—could not be *the* Servant unless He were the Son. This designation, as applied to Jesus Christ, is peculiar to these three or four earlier chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. It is interesting because it occurs over and over again here, and because it never occurs anywhere else in the New

Testament. If we recognize what I think must be recognized, that it is a quotation from the ancient prophecies, and the assertion of the Messianic character of Jesus, then I think we here see the Church in a period of transition in regard to its conceptions of its Lord. There is no sign that the proper Sonship and Divinity of our Lord was clear before them at this period. They had the facts, but they had not yet come to the distinct apprehension of how much was involved in these. But, if they knew that Jesus Christ had died and had risen again—and they knew that, for they had seen Him—and if they believed that He was the Messiah, and if they were certain that in His character of Messiah there had been faultlessness and absolute perfection—and they were certain of that, because they had lived beside Him—then it would not be long before they took the next step, and said, as I say, “He cannot be the Servant unless He is more than man.”

And we may well ask ourselves the question, if we admit, as the world does admit, the moral perfectness of Jesus Christ, how comes it that this Man alone managed to escape failure, and deflections from the right, and sins, and that He only carried through life a stainless garment, and went down to the grave never having needed, and not needing then, the exercise of Divine forgiveness? Brethren, I venture to say that it is hopeless to account for Jesus Christ on naturalistic principles; and that either you should give up your belief in His sinlessness, or advance, as the Christian Church as a whole advanced, to the other belief, on which alone that perfectness is

explicable: "Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ. Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father."

II.—And so, secondly, let us turn to the other contrast here—the Servant and the slaves.

I said that the humble group of praying, persecuted believers seemed to have wished to take a lower place than their Master's, even whilst they ventured to assume that, in some sense, they too, like Him, were doing the Father's will. So they chose, by a fine instinct of humility rather than from any dogmatical prepossessions, the name that expresses, in its most absolute and roughest form, the notion of bondage and servitude. He is the Servant; we standing here are slaves. And that this is not an overweighting of the word with more than is meant in it seems to be confirmed by the fact that in the first clause of this prayer we have, for the only time in the New Testament, God addressed as "Lord," in the correlative word to *slave*, which has been transferred into English—namely, *despot*.

The true place, then, for a man is to be God's slave. The harsh, repellent features of that wicked institution assume an altogether different character when they become the features of my relation to Him. Absolute submission, unconditional obedience, on the slave's part; and on the part of the Master complete ownership; the right of life and death; the right of disposing of all goods and chattels; the right of separating husband and wife, parents and children; the right of issuing commandments without a reason; the right to expect that those commandments shall be swiftly, unhesitatingly, punctiliously, and com-

pletely performed ; these things inhere in our relation to God. Blessed the man who has learned that they do, and has accepted them as His highest glory and the security of His most blessed life ! For, brethren, such submission, absolute and unconditional, the bending of, and the absorption of my own will in His will, is the secret of all that makes manhood glorious and great and happy.

Remember, however, that in the New Testament these names of slave and owner are transferred to Christians and Jesus Christ. "The servant" has his slaves ; and He who is God's, and does not His own will, but the Father's will, has us for His, imposes His will upon us, and we are bound to render to Him the same revenue of entire obedience which He hath laid at His Father's feet.

Such slavery is the only freedom. Liberty does not mean to do as you like, it means to like as you ought, and to do that. He only is free who submits to God in Christ, and thereby overcomes himself and the world and all antagonism, and is able to do that which it is His life to do. The prison out of which we do not desire to go is no restraint, and the will which coincides with law is the only will that is truly free. You talk about the bondage of obedience. Ah ! "the weight of too much liberty" is a far sorer bondage. They are the slaves who say, "Let us break His bonds asunder, and cast away His cords from us" ; and they are the free men who say, "Lord, put Thy blessed shackles on my arms, and impose Thy will upon my will, and fill my heart with Thy love ; and then will and hands will move freely and delightedly."

“If the Son make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”

Such slavery is the only nobility. In the wicked old empires, as in some of their modern survivals to-day, viziers and prime ministers were mostly drawn from the servile classes. It is so in God's kingdom. They who make themselves God's slaves are by Him made kings and priests, and shall reign with Him on earth. “If a slave, then a son and a heir of God through Jesus Christ.”

Remember the alternative. You cannot be your own masters without being your own slaves. It is a far worse bondage to live chartered libertines than to live in the paths of obedience. Better serve God than the devil; than the world; than the flesh. Whilst they promise them liberty, they make them “the most abject and downtrodden vassals of perdition.”

The Servant-Son makes us slaves and sons. It matters nothing to me that Jesus Christ perfectly fulfilled the law of God. So much the better for Him, but of no value for me, unless He has the power of making me like Himself. And He has it, and if you will trust yourselves to Him, and give your hearts to Him, and ask Him to govern you, He will govern you; and if you will abandon your false liberty, which is servitude, and take the sober freedom, which is obedience, then He will bring you to share in His temper of joyful service; and even we may be able to say, “My meat and My drink is to do the will of Him that sent Me.” And saying that, we shall have the key to all delights, and our feet will be, at least, on



the lower rungs of the ladder whose top reaches to Heaven.

“What fruit had ye in the things of which ye are now ashamed? But being made free from sin, and become the slaves of God, ye have your fruit unto holiness; and the end everlasting life.” Brethren, I beseech you, by the mercies of God, that ye yield yourselves to Him, and say, “O Lord, truly I am Thy servant. Thou hast loosed my bonds.”



## Christ's Farewell to the World.

"THEN Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light."—JOHN xii. 35, 36.



THESE are the last words of our Lord's public ministry. He afterwards spoke only to His followers in the sweet seclusion of the sympathetic home at Bethany, and amid the sanctities of the upper chamber. "Yet a little while am I with you." The sun had all but set. Two days more, and the Cross was reared on Calvary. But there was yet time to turn to the light. And so His Divine charity "hoped all things," and continued to plead with those who had so long rejected Him. As befits a last appeal, the words unveil the heart of Christ. They are solemn with warning, radiant with promise, almost beseeching in their earnestness. He loves too well not to warn. But He will not leave the bitterness of threatening as a last savour on the palate, and so the lips, into which grace is poured, bade farewell to His enemies with the promise and the hope that even they may become "the sons of light."

The solemnity of the occasion, then, gives great force to the words ; and the remembrance of it sets us on the right track for estimating their significance. Let us see what lessons for us there may be in Christ's last words to the world.

I.—There is, first, a self revelation.

It is no mere grammatical pedantry that draws attention to the fact that four times in this text does our Lord employ the definite article, and speak of *the* light. And that that is no mere accident is obvious from the fact that, in the last clause of our text, where the general idea of light is all that is meant to be emphatic, the article is omitted. " Yet a little while is *the* light with you ; walk while ye have *the* light." " While ye have *the* light believe in *the* light, that ye may be the children of light."

So then, most distinctly here, in His final appeal to the world, He draws back the curtain, as it were, takes away the shade that had covered the lamp, and lets one full beam stream out for the last impression that He leaves. Is it not profoundly significant and impressive that then, of all times, over and over again, in the compass of these short verses, this Galilean peasant makes the tremendous assertion that He is what none other can be, in a solitary and transcendent sense, *the* Light of mankind ? Undismayed by universal rejection, unfaltering in spite of the curling lips of incredulity and scorn, unbroken by the near approach of certain martyrdom, He presents Himself before the world as its light. Nothing in the history of mad, fanatical claims to inspiration and Divine authority is to be compared with these assertions of our Lord's. He is the fountal source, He says, of all

illumination ; He stands before the whole race, and claims to be "the Master-Light of all our seeing." Whatsoever ideas of clearness of knowledge, of rapture of joy, of whiteness of purity, are symbolized by that great emblem, He declares that He manifests all to men. Others may shine ; but they are, as He said, "lights kindled," and therefore "burning." Others may shine, but they have caught the radiance from Him. All teachers, all helpers, all thinkers draw their inspiration, if they have any, from Him, in whom was life, and the life was the light of men.

There has been blazing in the heavens, of late months, a new star, that burst upon astonished astronomers in a void spot ; but its brilliancy, though far transcending that of our sun, soon began to wane, and before long, apparently, there will be blackness again where there was blackness before. So all lights but His are temporary as well as derived, and men "willing for a season to rejoice" in the fleeting splendours, and to listen to the teacher of a day, lose the illumination of His presence and guidance of His thoughts as the ages roll on. But *the* Light is "not for an age, but for all time."

Now, brethren, this is Christ's estimate of Himself. I dwell not on it for the purpose of seeking to exhaust its depth of significance. In it there lies the assertion that He, and He only, is the source of all valid knowledge concerning God and men, and their mutual relations of the deepest sort. In it lie the assertion that He, and He only, is the source of all true gladness that may blend with our else darkened lives, and the further assertion that from Him, and from Him alone, can flow to us the purity that shall make us

pure. We have to turn to that Man close by His Cross, on whom while He spoke the penumbra of the eclipse of death was beginning to show itself, and to say to Him what the Psalmist said of old to the Jehovah whom he knew, and whom we recognize as indwelling in Jesus, "With Thee is the fountain of life. Thou makest us to drink of the river of Thy pleasures. In Thy light shall we see light."

So Christ thought of Himself; so Christ would have us to think of Him. And it becomes a question for us, how, if we refuse to accept that claim of a solitary, underived, eternal, and universal power of illuminating mankind, we can save His character for the veneration of the world. We cannot go picking and choosing amongst the Master's words, and say, "This is historical, and that mythical." We cannot select some of them, and leave others on one side. You must take the whole Christ if you take any Christ. And the whole Christ is He who, within sight of Calvary, and in the face of all but universal rejection, lifted up His voice, and, as His valediction to the world, declared, "I am the Light of the world." So He says to us. Oh, that we all might cast ourselves before Him, with the cry, "Lighten our darkness, O Lord, we beseech Thee!"

II.—Secondly, we have here a double exhortation.

"Walk in the light; believe in the light." These two sum up all our duties; or rather, unveil for us the whole fulness of the possible privileges and blessings of which our relation to that light is capable. It is obvious that the latter of them is the deeper in idea, and the prior in order of sequence. There must be the "belief" in the light before there is the "walk"

in the light. Walking includes the ideas of external activity and of progress. And so, putting these two exhortations together, we get the whole of Christianity considered as subjective. "Believe in the light; trust in the light," and then "walk" in it. A word, then, about each of these branches of this double exhortation.

"Trust in the light." The figure seems to be dropped at first sight; for it wants little faith to believe in the sunshine at mid-day; and when the light is pouring out, how can a man but see it? But the apparent incongruity of the metaphor points to something very deep in regard to the spiritual side. We cannot but believe in the light that meets the eye when it meets it, but it is possible for a man to blind himself to the shining of this light. Therefore, the exhortation is needed—"Believe in the light," for only by believing it can you see it. Just as the eye is the organ of sight, just as its nerves are sensitive to the mysterious finger of the beam, just as on its mirrored surface impinges the gentle but mighty force that has winged its way across all the space between us and the sun, and yet falls without hurting, so faith, the "inward eye which makes the bliss" of the solitary soul, is the one organ by which you and I can see the light. "Seeing is believing," says the old proverb. That is true in regard of the physical. Believing is seeing, is much rather the way to put it in regard of the spiritual and Divine.

Only as we trust the light do we see the light. Unless you and I put our confidence in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man, we have no adequate knowledge of Him and no clear vision of Him. We



must know that we may love ; but we must love that we may know. We must believe that we may see. True, we must see that we may believe, but the preliminary vision which precedes belief is slight and dim as compared with the solidity and the depth of assurance with which we apprehend the reality and know the lustre of Him whom our faith has grasped. You will never know the glory of the light, nor the sweetness with which it falls upon the gazing eye, until you turn your face to that Master, and so receive on your susceptible and waiting heart the warmth and the radiance which He only can bestow. "Believe in the light."

Trust it ; or rather trust Him who is it. He cannot deceive. This light from heaven can never lead astray. Absolutely we may rely upon it ; unconditionally we must follow it. Lean upon Him—to take another metaphor—with all your weight. His arm is strong to bear the burden of our weaknesses, sorrows, and, above all, our sins. "While ye have light, trust the light."

But then that is not enough. Man, with his double relations, must have an active and external as well as an inward and contemplative life. And so our Lord, side by side with the exhortation on which I have been touching, puts the other one, "Walk in the light." Your inward emotions, however deep and precious, however real the affiance, however whole-hearted the love, are maimed and stunted, and not what the light requires, unless there follows upon them the activity of the walk. What do we get the daylight for ? To sit and gaze at it ? By no means ; but that it may guide us upon our path and help us

in all our work. And so all Christian people need ever to remember that Jesus Christ has indissolubly bound together these two phases of our relation to Him as the light of life—inward and blessed contemplation by faith and outward practical activity. To walk is, of course, the familiar metaphor for the external life of man, and all our deeds are to be in conformity with the Light, and in communion with Him. This is the deepest designation, perhaps, of the true character of a Christian life in its external aspect—that it walks in Christ, doing nothing but as His light shines, and ever bearing along with it conscious fellowship with Him who is thus the guiding and irradiating and gladdening and sanctifying life of our lives. “*Walk in the light as He is in the light.*” Our days fleet and change; His are stable and the same. For, although these words, which I have quoted, in their original application refer to God the Father, they are no less true about Him who rests at the right hand of God, and is one light with Him. He *is* in the light. We may approximate to that stable and calm radiance, even though our lives are passed through changing scenes, and effort and struggle are their characteristics. And oh! how blessed, brother, such a life will be, all gladdened by the unsetting and unclouded sunshine that even in the shadiest places shines, and turns the darkness of the valley of the shadow of death into solemn light; teaching gloom to glow with a hidden sun!

But there is not only the idea of activity here, there is the further notion of progress. Unless Christian people to their faith add work, and have both their faith and their consequent work in a

continual condition of progress and growth, there is little reason to believe that they apprehend the light at all. If you trust the light you walk in it; and if your days are not in conformity nor in communion with Him, and are not advancing nearer and nearer to the central blaze, then it becomes you to ask yourselves whether you have verily seen at all, or trusted at all, "the Light of life."

III.—Thirdly, there is here a warning.

"Walk whilst ye have the light, lest the darkness come upon you." There is the summing up of the whole history of that stiff-necked and miraculous people. For what has all the history of Israel been since that day but groping in the wilderness without any pillar of fire? But there is more than that in it. Christ gives us this one solemn warning of what falls on us if we turn away from Him. Rejected light is the parent of the densest darkness, and the man who, having the light, does not trust it, piles around himself thick clouds of obscurity and gloom, far more doleful and impenetrable than the twilight that glimmers round the men who have never known the daylight of revelation. The history of un-Christian and anti-Christian Christendom is a terrible commentary upon these words of the Master, and the cries that we hear all round us to-day from men who will not follow the light of Christ, and moan or boast that they dwell in agnostic darkness, tell us that, of all the eclipses that can fall upon heart and mind, there is none so dismal or thunderously dark as that of the men who, having seen the light of Christ in the sky, have turned from it and said, "It is no light, it is only a mock sun." Brethren, tempt not that fate.

And if Christian men and women do not advance in their knowledge and their conformity, like clouds of darkness will fall upon them. None are so hopeless as the unprogressive Christian, none so far away as those who have been brought nigh and have never come any nigher. If you believe the light, see that you growingly trust and walk in it, else darkness will come upon you, and you will know not whither you go.

IV.—And, lastly, there is here a hope and a promise. “That ye may be the sons of light.”

Faith and obedience turn a man into the likeness of that in which he trusts. If we trust Jesus we open our hearts to Him; and if we open our hearts to Him He will come in. If you are in a darkened room, what have you to do in order to have it filled with glad sunshine? Open the shutters and pull up the blinds, and the light will do all the rest. If you trust the light, it will rush in and fill every crevice and cranny of your hearts. Faith and obedience will mould us, by their natural effect, into the resemblance of that on which we lean. As one of the old German mystics said, “What thou lovest that thou dost become.” And it is blessedly true. The same principle makes Christians like Christ, and makes idolaters like their gods. “They that make them are like unto them; so is everyone that trusteth in them,” says one of the Psalms. “They followed after vanity and are become vain,” says the chronicler of Israel’s defections. “We with unveiled faces beholding”—or mirroring—“the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image.” Trust the light and you become “sons of the light.”

And so, dear friends, all of us may hope that by

degrees, the reward of faith and of walking, we still may bear the image of the heavenly, even here on earth. While as yet we only believe in the light, we may participate in its transforming power, like some far-off planet on the utmost bounds of some solar system, that receives faint and small supplies of light and warmth, through a thick atmosphere of vapour, and across immeasurable spaces. But we have the assurance that we shall be carried nearer our centre, and then, like the planets that are closer to the sun than our earth is, we shall feel the fuller power of the heat, and be saturated with the glory of the light. "We shall see Him as He is"; and then we, too, "shall blaze forth like the sun in the Kingdom of our Father."



## XXVI.

### What Children of Light should be.

“WALK as children of light.”—EPHESIANS v. 8.



T was our Lord who coined this great name for His disciples. Paul's use of it is probably a reminiscence of the Master's, and so is a hint of the existence of the same teachings as we now find in the existing Gospels, long before their day. Jesus Christ said, "Believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light"; and Paul gives substantially the same account of the way by which a man becomes a Son of the Light when he says, in the words preceding my text, "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord."

Union with Him makes light, just as the bit of carbon will glow as long as it is in contact with the electric force, and subsides again into darkness when that is switched off. To be in Christ is to be a child of light, and to believe in Christ is to be in Him.

But the intense moral earnestness of our apostle is



indicated by the fact that on both occasions in which he uses this designation he does so, not for the purpose of heightening the sense of the honour and prerogative attached to it, but for the sake of deducing from it plain and stringent moral duties, and heightening the sense of obligation to holy living.

"Walk as children of light." Be true to your truest, deepest self. Manifest what you are. Let the sweet, sacred secrets of inward communion come out in the trivialities of ordinary conduct; make of your every thought a deed, and see to it that every deed be vitalized and purified by its contact with the great truths and thoughts that lie in this name. These are various ways of putting this one all-sufficient directory of conduct.

Now, in the context the Apostle expands this concentrated exhortation in three or four different directions, and perhaps we may best set forth its meaning if we shape our remarks by these. I venture to cast them, for the sake of emphasis, into a hortatory form.

I.—Aim at an all-round productiveness of the natural fruits of the light.

The true reading is, "Walk as children of light, for the fruit of the light" (not *spirit*, as the *Authorized Version* reads it) "is in all goodness and righteousness and truth." Now, it is obvious that the alteration of "light" instead of "spirit" brings the words into connection with the preceding and the following. The reference to the "fruits of the spirit" would be entirely irrelevant in this place; a reference

to the "fruit of the *light*," as being every form of goodness and righteousness and truth, is altogether in place.

There is, then, a natural tendency in the light to blossom out into all forms and types of goodness. "Fruit" suggests the idea of natural, silent, spontaneous, effortless growth. And, although that is by no means a sufficient account of the process by which bad men become good men, it is an inseparable element, in all true moral renovation, that it be the natural outcome and manifestation of an inward principle; otherwise it is mere, hypocritical adornment, or superficial appearance. If we are to do good we must first of all *be* good. If from us there are to come righteousness and truth, and all the graces of character, there must, first of all, be the radical change which is involved in passing from separation in the darkness to union with Jesus Christ in the light. The Apostle's theory of moral renovation is that you must begin with the implantation in the spirit of the source of all moral goodness — viz., Jesus Christ — brought into the heart by the uniting power of humble faith. And then there will be lodged in our being a vital power, of which the natural outcome will be all manner of fair and pure things. Effort is needed, as I shall have to say, but prior to effort there must be union with Jesus Christ.

This wide general commandment of our text is sufficiently definite, thinks Paul; for if the light be in you it will naturally effloresce into all forms of beauty.

Light is the condition of fruitfulness. Everywhere the vital germ is only acted upon by the light. No sunshine, no flowers; darkness produces thin, etiolated, whitened, and feeble shoots at the best. Let the light blaze in, and the blanched feebleness becomes vigorous and unfolds itself. How much more will light be the condition of fruitfulness when the very light itself is the seed from which all fruit is developed.

But, still further, mark how there must be an all-round completeness in order that we shall fairly set forth the glory and power of the light of which our faith makes us children and partakers. The fruit "is in all goodness and righteousness and truth." These three aspects, the good, the right, the true, may not be a scientific ethical classification, but they give a sufficiently plain and practical distinction. Goodness, in which the prevailing idea is beneficence and the kindlier virtues; righteousness, which refers to the sterner graces of justice; truth, in which the prevalent idea is conformity in action with facts and the conditions of man's life and entire sincerity—these three do cover, with sufficient completeness, the whole ground of possible human excellence. But the Apostle widens them still further by that little word *all*.

We all tend to cultivate those virtues which are in accordance with our natural dispositions, or are made most easy to us by our circumstances. And there is nothing in which we more need to seek comprehensiveness than in the effort to educate ourselves into, and to educe from ourselves, kinds of goodness and

forms of excellence which are not naturally in accordance with our dispositions, or facilitated by our circumstances. The tree planted in the shrubbery will grow all lopsided; the bushes on the edge of the cliff will be shorn away on the windward side by the teeth of the south-western gale, and will lean over northwards, on the side of least resistance. And so we all are apt to content ourselves with doing the good things that are easiest for us, or that fit into our temperament and character. Jesus Christ would have us to be all-round men, and would that we should seek to aim after and possess the kinds of excellence that are least cognate to our characters. Are you strong, and do you pride yourself upon your firmness? Cultivate gentleness. Are you amiable, and pride yourself, perhaps, upon your sympathetic tenderness? Try to get a little iron and quinine into your constitution. Seek to be the man that you are least likely to be, and aim at a comprehensive development of "*all* righteousness and goodness and truth."

Further, remember that this all-round completeness is not attained as the result of an effortless growth. True, these things are the fruits of the light, but also true, they are the prizes of struggle and the trophies of warfare. No man will ever attain to the comprehensive moral excellence which it is in his own power to win; no Christian will ever be as all-round a good man as he has the opportunities of being, unless he makes it his business, day by day, to aim after the conscious increase of gifts that he possesses, and the conscious appropriation and possession of

those of which he is still lacking. "Nothing of itself will come," or very little. True, the light will shine out in variously tinted ray if it be in a man, as surely as from the seed come the blade and the ear and the full corn in the ear, but you will not have nor keep the light which thus will unfold itself unless you put forth appropriate effort. Christ comes into our hearts, but we have to bring Him there. Christ dwells in our hearts, but we have to work into our nature, and work out in action, the gifts that He bestows. They will advance but little in the Divine life who trust to the natural unfolding of the supernatural life within them, and do not help its unfolding by their own resolute activity. "Walk as children of the light." There is your duty, for "the fruit of the light is all righteousness." One might have supposed that the commandments would be, "Be passive as children of the light, for the light will grow." But the Apostle binds together, as always, the two things, the Divine working and the human effort at reception, retention, and application of that Divine work, just as he does in the great classical passage, "Work out your own salvation, for it is God that worketh in you."

II.—Secondly, the general exhortation of my text widens out itself into this—test all things by Christ's approval of them.

"Proving what is well pleasing unto the Lord." That, according to the natural construction of the Greek, is the main way by which the Apostle conceives that his general commandment of "walking as children of the light" is to be carried out. You do it

if, step by step, and moment by moment, and to every action of life, you apply this standard—Does Christ like it? Does it please Him? When that test is rigidly applied, then, and only then, will you walk as becomes the children of the light.

So, then, there is a standard—not what men approve, not what my conscience, partially illuminated, may say is permissible, not what is recognized as allowable by the common maxims of the world round about us, but Christ's approval. How different the hard, stern, and often unwelcome prescriptions of law and rigidity of some standards of right become when they are changed into that which pleases the Divine Lord and Lover! Surely it is something blessed that the hard, cold, and to such a large extent powerless conceptions of duty or obligation shall be changed into pleasing Jesus Christ; and that so our hearts shall be enlisted in the service of our consciences, and love shall be glad to do the Beloved's will. There are many ways by which the burden of life's obligations is lightened to the Christian. I do not know that any of them is more precious than the fact that law is changed into His will, and that we seek to do what is right because it pleases the Master. There is the standard.

It will be easy for us to come to the right appreciation of individual actions when we are living in the light. Union with Jesus Christ will make us quick to discern His will. We have a conscience. Well, that needs educating and enlightening, and very often correcting. We have the Word of God. Well, that



needs explanation, and needs to be brought close to our hearts. If we have Christ dwelling in us, in the measure in which we are in sympathy with Him we shall be gifted with clear eyes, not indeed to discern the expedient—that belongs to another region altogether, but we shall be gifted with very clear eyes to discern right from wrong, and there will be an instinctive recoil from the evil, and an instinctive attachment of ourselves to the good. If we are in the Lord we shall easily be able to prove what is acceptable and well-pleasing to Him.

We shall never walk as the children of the light, unless we have the habit of referring everything, trifles and great things, to His arbitrament, and seeking in them all to do what is pleasing in His sight. The smallest deed may be brought under the operation of the largest principles. Gravitation influences the microscopic grain of sand as well as planets and sun. There is nothing so small but you can bring it into this category—it either pleases or displeases Jesus Christ. And the faults into which Christian men fall and in which they continue are very largely owing to their carelessness in applying this standard to the small things of their daily lives. The sleepy Custom House officers let the contraband article in because it seems to be of small bulk. There are old stories about how strong castles were taken by armed men hidden in an innocent-looking cart of forage. Do you keep a rigid inspection at the frontier, and see to it that everything vindicates its right to enter because it is pleasing to Jesus Christ.

III.—Thirdly, we have here another expansion of the general command, and that is—keep well separate from the darkness.

“Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.” Now, your time will not allow me to dwell, as I had hoped to do, upon the considerations to be suggested here. The very briefest possible mention of them is all that I can afford.

“The unfruitful works of darkness.” Well, then, the darkness has its works, but though they be works they are not worth calling fruit. That is to say, nothing except the conduct which flows from union with Jesus Christ so corresponds to the man’s nature and relations, or has any such permanence about it as to entitle it to be called fruit. Other acts may be “works,” but Paul will not dishonour the great word “fruit” by applying it to such rubbish as these, and so he brands them as “unfruitful works of darkness.”

Keep well clear of them, says the Apostle. He is not talking here about the relations between Christians and others, but about the relations between Christian men and the *works* of darkness. Only, of course, in order to avoid fellowship with the works you will have to keep yourselves well separate sometimes from their doers. Much association with such men is forced upon us by circumstances, and much is the imperative duty of Christian beneficence and charity. But I venture to express the strong and growing conviction that there are few exhortations that the secularized Church of this generation needs

more than this commandment of my text: "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness." "What communion hath light with darkness?" Ah! we see plenty of it, unnatural as it is, in the so-called Church of to-day. "What concord hath Christ with Belial? What part hath he that believeth with an infidel? Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate."

And, brethren, remember, a part of the separation is that your light shall be a constant condemnation of the darkness. "But rather reprove them," says my text. That is a work that devolves upon all Christians. It is to be done, no doubt, by the silent condemnation of evil which ever comes from the quiet doing of good. As an old preacher has it, "The presence of a saint hinders the devil of elbow-room for doing his tricks." The old legend told us that the fire-darting Apollo shot his radiant arrows against the pythons and "dragons of the slime." The sons of light have the same office—by their light of life to make the darkness aware of itself, and ashamed of itself; and to change it into light.

But silent reproving is not all our duty. The Christian Church has wofully fallen beneath its duty, not only in regard of its complicity with the social crimes of each generation, but in regard of its cowardly silence towards them; especially when they flaunt and boast themselves in high places. What has the Church said worthy of itself in regard to war? What has the Church said worthy of itself in regard to impurity? What has the Church said worthy of

itself in regard of drunkenness? What has the Church said worthy of itself in regard of the social vices that are honeycombing society and this city to-day? If you are the sons of light, walk as the sons of light, and have "no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness"; but set the trumpet to your lips, and "declare unto My people their transgressions, and to the house of Israel their sin."



## The Tillage of the Poor.

“MUCH food is in the tillage of the poor.”—PROVERBS xiii. 23.



PALESTINE was a land of small peasant proprietors, and the institution of the Jubilee was intended to prevent the acquisition of large estates by any Israelite. The consequence, as intended, was a level of modest prosperity. It was “the tillage of the poor,” the careful, diligent husbandry of the man who had only a little patch of land to look after, that filled the storehouses of the Holy Land. Hence the proverb of our text arose. It preserves the picture of the economical conditions in which it originated, and it is capable of, and is intended to have, an application to all forms and fields of work. In all it is true that the bulk of the harvested results are due, not to the large labours of the few, but to the minute, unnoticed toils of the many. Small service is true service, and the aggregate of such produces large crops. Spade husbandry gets most out of the ground. The labourer’s allotment of half an acre is generally more prolific than the average of the squire’s estate. Much may be made of slender gifts, small resources, and limited opportunities if carefully cultivated, as

they should be, and as their very slenderness should stimulate their being.

One of the psalms accuses "the children of Ephraim" because, "being armed and carrying bows, they turned back in the day of battle." That saying deduces obligation from equipment, and preaches a stringent code of duty to those who are in any direction largely gifted. Power to its last particle is duty, and not small is the crime of those who, with great capacities, have small desire to use them, and leave the brunt of the battle to half-trained soldiers, badly armed.

But the imagery of the fight is not sufficient to include all aspects of Christian effort. The peaceful toil of the "husbandman that labours" stands, in one of Paul's letters, side by side with the heroism of the "man that warreth." Our text gives us the former image, and so supplements that other.

It completes the lesson of the psalm in another respect, as insisting on the importance, not of the well-endowed, but of the slenderly-furnished, who are immensely in the majority. This text is a message to ordinary, mediocre people, without much ability or influence.

I.—It teaches, first, the responsibility of small gifts.

It is no mere accident that in our Lord's great parable He represents the man with the *one* talent as the hider of his gift. There is a certain pleasure in doing what we can do, or fancy we can do, well. There is a certain pleasure in the exercise of any kind of gift, be it of body or mind; but when we know that we are but very slightly gifted by Him, there is a temptation to say, "Oh, it does



not matter much whether I contribute my share to this, that, or the other work or no. I am but a poor man. My half-crown will make but a small difference in the total. I am possessed of very little leisure. The few minutes that I can spare for individual cultivation, or for benevolent work, will not matter at all. I am only an insignificant unit: nobody pays any attention to my opinion. It does not in the least signify whether I make my influence felt in regard of social, religious, or political questions, and the like. I can leave all that to the more influential men. My littleness at least has the prerogative of immunity. My little finger would produce such a slight impact on the scale that it is indifferent whether I apply it or not. It is a good deal easier for me to wrap up my talent—which, after all, is only a threepenny bit, and not a talent—and put it away and do nothing.”

Yes, but then you forget, dear friend, that responsibility does not diminish with the size of the gifts, but that there is as great responsibility for the use of the smallest as for the use of the largest, and that although it does not matter very much to anybody but yourself what you do, it matters all the world to you.

But then, besides that, my text tells us that it does matter whether the poor man sets himself to make the most of his little patch of ground or not. “There is much food in the tillage of the poor.” The slenderly endowed are the immense majority. There is a genius or two here and there, dotted along the line of the world’s and the Church’s history. The great men and wise men and mighty men and wealthy men may be counted by units, but the men that are not very much

of anything are to be counted by millions. And unless we can find some stringent law of responsibility that applies to them, the bulk of the human race will be under no obligation to do anything either for God or for their fellows, or for themselves. If I am absolved from the task of bringing my weight to bear on the side of right because my weight is infinitesimal, and I am only one in a million, suppose all the million were to plead the same excuse; what then? Then there would not be any weight on the side of the right at all. The barns in Palestine were not filled by farming on a great scale like that pursued away out on the western prairies, where one man will own, and his servants will plough a furrow for miles long, but they were filled by the small industries of the owners of tiny patches.

The "tillage of the poor," meaning thereby not the mendicant, but the peasant-owner of a little plot, yielded the bulk of the "food." The wholesome old proverb, "many littles make a mickle," is as true about the influence brought to bear in the world to arrest evil and to sweeten corruption as it is about anything besides. Christ has a great deal more need of the cultivation of the small patches that He gives to the most of us than He has even of the cultivation of the large estates that He bestows on a few. Responsibility is not to be measured by amount of gift, but is equally stringent, entire, and absolute whatsoever be the magnitude of the endowments from which it arises.

Let me remind you, too, how the same virtues and excellences can be practised in the administering of the smallest as in that of the greatest gifts. Men say—I dare say some of you have said—"Oh! if I were

eloquent like So-and-so ; rich like somebody else ; a man of weight and importance like some other, how I would consecrate my powers to the Master ! But I am slow of speech, or nobody minds me, or I have but very little that I can give." Yes ! "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much." If you do not utilize the capacity possessed, to increase the estate would only be to increase the crop of weeds from its uncultivated clods. We never palm off a greater deception on ourselves than when we try to hoodwink conscience by pleading bounded gifts as an excuse for boundless indolence, and to persuade ourselves that if we could do more we should be less inclined to do nothing. The most largely endowed has no more obligation and no fairer field than the most slenderly gifted lies under and possesses.

All service coming from the same motive and tending to the same end is the same with God. Not the magnitude of the act, but the motive thereof, determines the whole character of the life of which it is a part. The same graces of obedience, consecration, quick sympathy, self-denying effort may be cultivated and manifested in the spending of a halfpenny as in the administration of millions. The smallest rainbow in the tiniest drop that hangs from some sooty eave and catches the sunlight has precisely the same lines, in the same order, as the great arch that strides across half the sky. If you go to the Giant's Causeway, or to the other end of it amongst the Scotch Hebrides, you will find the hexagonal basaltic pillars all of identically the same pattern and shape, whether their height be measured by feet or by

tenths of an inch. Big or little, they obey exactly the same law. There is "much food in the tillage of the poor."

II.—But now, note, again, how there must be a diligent cultivation of the small gifts.

The inventor of this proverb had looked carefully and sympathetically at the way in which the little peasant proprietors worked; and he saw in that a pattern for all life. It is not always the case, of course, that a little holding means good husbandry, but it is generally so; and you will find few waste corners and few unweeded patches on the ground of a man whose whole ground is measured by rods instead of by miles. There will usually be little waste time, and few neglected opportunities of working in the case of the peasant whose subsistence, with that of his family, depends on the diligent and wise cropping of the little patch that does belong to him.

And so, dear brethren, if you and I have to take our place in the ranks of the one-talented men, the commonplace run of ordinary people, the more reason for us to enlarge our gifts by a sedulous diligence, by an unwearied perseverance, by a keen look-out for all opportunities of service, and above all by a prayerful dependence upon Him from whom alone comes the power to toil, and who alone gives the increase. The less we are conscious of large gifts the more we should be bowed in dependence on Him from whom cometh every good and perfect gift; and who gives according to His wisdom; and the more earnestly should we use that slender possession which God may have given us. Industry applied to small natural capacity

will do far more than larger power rusted away by sloth. You all know that it is so in regard of daily life, and common business, and the acquisition of mundane sciences and arts. It is just as true in regard of the Christian race, and of the Christian Church's work of witness.

Who are they who have done the most in this world for God and for men? The largely endowed men? "Not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble are called." The coral insect is microscopic, but it will build up from the profoundest depth of the ocean a reef against which the whole Pacific may dash in vain. It is the small gifts that, after all, are the important ones. So let us cultivate them the more earnestly, the more humbly we think of our own capacity. "Play well thy part; there all the honour lies." God, who has builded up some of the towering Alps out of mica flakes, builds up His Church out of infinitesimally small particles—slenderly endowed men touched by the consecration of His love.

III.—Lastly, let me remind you of the harvest reaped from these slender gifts when sedulously tilled.

Two great results of such conscientious cultivation and use of small resources and opportunities may be suggested as included in that abundant "food" of which the text speaks.

The faithfully used faculty increases. "To him that hath shall be given." "Oh, if I had a wider sphere how I would flame in it, and fill it!" Then twinkle your best in your little sphere, and that will bring a wider one some time or other. For, as a rule, and in the general, though with exceptions, opportunities

come to the man that can use them ; and roughly, but yet substantially, men are set in this world where they can shine to the most advantage to God. Fill your place ; and if you, like Paul, have borne witness for the Master in little Jerusalem, He will not keep you there, but carry you to bear witness for Him in imperial Rome itself.

The old fable of the man who told his children to dig all over the field and they would find treasure, has its true application in regard of Christian effort and faithful stewardship of the gifts bestowed upon us. The sons found no gold, but they improved the field, and secured its bearing golden harvests, and they strengthened their own muscles, which was better than gold. So, if we want larger endowments, let us honestly use what we possess, and use will make growth.

The other issue, about which I need not say more than a word, is that the final reward of all faithful service—"Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" is said, not to the brilliant, but to the "faithful," servant. In that great parable, which is the very text-book of this whole subject of gifts and responsibilities and recompense, the men who were entrusted with unequal sums used these unequal sums with equal diligence, as is manifest by the fact that they realised an equal rate of increase. He that got two talents made two more out of them, and he that had five did no more ; for he, too, but doubled his capital. So, because the poorer servant with his two, and the richer with his ten, had equally cultivated their diversely-measured estates, they were identical in reward ; and to each of them the same thing is said :



“Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” It matters little whether we copy some great picture upon a canvas as big as the side of a house, or upon a thumb-nail ; the main thing is that we copy it. If we truly employ whatsoever gifts God has given to us, then we shall be accepted according to that we have, and not according to that we have not.



## XXVIII.

### More Value than many Sparrows.

"YEA, the sparrow hath found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even Thine altars, O Lord of Hosts, my King, and my God."—PSALM lxxxiv. 3.



THE well-known saying of the saintly Rutherford, when he was silenced and exiled from his parish, echoes and expounds these words. "When I think," said he, "upon the sparrows and swallows that build their nests in the kirk of Anwoth, and of my dumb Sabbaths, my sorrowful, bleared eyes look asquint upon Christ, and present Him as angry." So sighed the Presbyterian minister in his compelled idleness in a prosaic seventeenth century Scotch town, answering his heart's-brother away back in the far-off time, and in such different circumstances. The Psalmist was probably a member of the Levitical family of the Sons of Korah, who were "doorkeepers in the house of the Lord." He knew what he was saying when he preferred his humble office to all honours among the godless. He was shut out by some unknown circumstances from external participation in the tabernacle rites, and longs to be even as one of the swallows or sparrows that twitter and flit round the sacred courts.

No doubt to him faith was much more inseparably attached to form than it should be for us. No doubt place and ritual were more to him than they can permissibly be to those who have heard and understood the great charter of spiritual worship spoken first to an outcast Samaritan of questionable character : "Neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem shall men worship the Father." But equally it is true that what he wanted was what the outward worship brought him, rather than the worship itself. And the psalm, which begins with "longing" and "fainting" for the courts of the Lord, and pronouncing benedictions on "those that dwell in Thy house," works itself clear, if I might so say, and ends with "O Lord of Hosts! Blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee"—for he shall "dwell in Thy house," wherever he is. So this flight of imagination in the words of my text may suggest to us two or three lessons.

I.—I take it first as pointing a bitter and significant contrast.

"The sparrow hath found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself," while I! We do not know what the Psalmist's circumstances were, but if we accept the conjecture that he may have accompanied David in his flight during Absalom's rebellion, we may fancy him as wandering on the uplands across Jordan, and sharing the agitations, fears, and sorrows of those dark hours, and in the midst of all, as the little company hurried hither and thither for safety, thinking, with a touch of bitter envy, of the calm restfulness and serene services of the peaceful tabernacle.

But, pathetic as is the complaint, when regarded as the sigh of a minister of the sanctuary exiled from the

shrine which was as his home, and from the worship which was his occupation and delight, it sounds a deeper note and one which awakens echoes in our hearts, when we hear in it, as we may, the complaint of humanity contrasting its unrest with the happier lot of lower creatures. Do you remember who it was that said—and on what occasion He said it—“Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have roosting-places, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head”? That saying, like our text, has a narrower and a wider application. In the former it pathetically paints the homeless Christ, a wanderer in a land peculiarly “His own,” and warns His enthusiastic would-be follower of the lot which he was so light-heartedly undertaking to share. But, when Jesus calls Himself Son of Man, He claims to be the realized ideal of humanity, and when, as in that saying, He contrasts the condition of “the Son of Man” with that of the animal creation, we can scarcely avoid giving to the words their wider application to the same contrast between man’s homelessness and the creatures’ repose which we have found in the Psalmist’s sigh.

Yes! There is only one being in this world that does not fit the world that he is in, and that is man, chief and foremost of all. Other beings perfectly correspond to what we now call their “environment.” Just as the soft mollusc fits every convolution of its shell, and the hard shell fits every curve of the soft mollusc, so every living thing corresponds to its place and its place to it, and with them all things go smoothly. But man, the crown of creation, is an exception to this else universal complete adaptation.

"The earth, O Lord, is full of Thy mercy," but the only creature who sees and says that is the only one who has further to say, "I am a stranger on the earth." He and he alone is stung with restlessness and conscious of longings and needs which find no satisfaction here. That sense of homelessness may be an agony or a joy, a curse or a blessing, according to our interpretation of its meaning, and our way of stilling it. It is not a sign of inferiority, but of a higher destiny, that we alone should bear in our spirits the "blank misgivings" of those who, amid unsatisfying surroundings, have blind feelings after "worlds not realized," which elude our grasp. It is no advantage over us that every fly dancing in the treacherous gleams of an April sun, and every other creature on the earth except ourselves, on whom the crown is set, is perfectly proportioned to its place, and has desire and possessions absolutely conterminous.

"The Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." Why must He alone wander homeless on the bleak moorland, whilst the sparrows and the swallows have their nests and their houses? Why? Because they *are* sparrows and swallows, and He is man, and "better than many sparrows." So let us lay to heart the sure promises, the blessed hopes, the stimulating exhortations, which come from that which, at first sight, seems to be a mystery and half an arraignment of the Divine wisdom, in the contrast between the restlessness of humanity and the reposeful contentment of those whom we call the lower creatures. Be true to the unrest, brother, and do not mistake its meaning, nor seek to still it, until it drives you to God.

II.—These words bring to us a plea which we may use, and a pledge on which we may rest.

“Thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.” The Psalmist pleads with God, and lays hold for his own confidence upon, the fact that creatures, who do not understand what the altar means, may build beside it, and those who have no notion of who the God is to whom the house is sacred, are yet cared for by Him. And he thinks to himself, “If I can say, *My King and my God,* surely He that takes care of them will not leave me uncared for.” The unrest of the soul that is capable of appropriating God is an unrest which has in it, if we understand it aright, the assurance that it shall be stilled and satisfied. He that is capable of entering into the close personal relationship with God which is expressed by that eloquent little pronoun and its reduplication with the two words, “King” and “God”—such a creature cannot cry for rest in vain, nor in vain grope, as a homeless wanderer, for the door of the Father’s house.

“Doth God care for oxen; or saith He it altogether for our sakes?” “Consider the fowls of the air; your heavenly Father feedeth them.” And the same argument which the Apostle used in the one of these sayings, and our Lord in the other, is valid and full of encouragement when applied to this matter. He that “satisfies the desires of every living thing,” and fills full the maw of the lowest creature; and puts the worms into the gaping beak of the young ravens, when they cry; is not the King to turn a deaf ear, or the back of His hand, to the man who can appeal to Him with this word on his lips, “My King and my God.” We grasp God when we say that; and all that



we see of provident recognition and supply of wants in dealings with these lower creatures should encourage us to cherish calm unshakable confidence that every true desire of our souls after Him is as certain to be satisfied.

And so the glancing swallows around the eaves of the Temple and the twittering sparrows on its pinnacles may proclaim to us, not only the contrast, which is bitter, but the confidence, which is sweet. We may be sure that we shall not be left uncared for amongst the many pensioners at His table, and that the deeper our wants the surer we are of their supply. Our bodies may hunger in vain—bodily hunger has no tendency to bring meat; but our spirits cannot hunger in vain if they hunger after God; for that hunger is the sure precursor and infallible prophet of the coming satisfaction.

These words not only may hearten us with confidence that our desires will be satisfied if they are set upon Him, but they point us to the one way by which they come. Say “My King and my God” in the deepest recesses of a spirit conscious of His presence, of a will submitting to His authority, of emptiness expectant of His fulness; say that, and you are in the house of the Lord. For it is not a question of place, it is a question of disposition and desire. And this Psalmist, though, when he began his song, he was far away from the Temple, and though he finished it sitting on the same hillside on which he began it, when he had ended it was within the curtains of the sanctuary and wrapt about with the presence of his God. He had regained as he sang what for a moment he had lost the consciousness of when he began—viz.,

the presence of God with him on the lone, dreary expanse of alien soil as truly as amidst the sanctities of what was called His house.

So, brethren, if we want rest, let us clasp God as ours ; if we desire a house warm, safe, sheltered from every wind that blows, and inaccessible to enemies, let us, like the swallows, nestle under the eaves of the Temple. Let us take God for our hope. They that hold communion with Him—and we can all do that wherever we are and whatever we may be doing—these, and only these, “ dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of their lives.” Therefore, with deepest simplicity of expression, our psalm goes on to describe, as equally recipients of blessedness, “ those that dwell in the house of the Lord,” and those in “ whose heart are the ways ” that lead to it, and to explain at last, as I have already pointed out, that both the dwellers in, and the pilgrims towards, that intimacy of abiding with God are included in the benediction showered on those who trust in Him, “ Blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee.”

III.—Lastly, we may take this picture of the Psalmist's as a warning.

Sparrows and swallows have very small brains. They build their nests, and they do not know whose altars they are flitting around. They pursue the insects on the wing, and they twitter their little songs ; and they do not understand how all their busy, glancing, brief, trivial life is being lived beneath the shadow of the cherubim, and all but in the presence of the veiled God of the Shekinah.

There are plenty of people who live like that. We are all tempted to build our nests where we may lay

our young, or dispose of ourselves or our treasures in the very sanctuary of God, with blind, crass indifference to the Presence in which we move. The Father's house has many mansions, and wherever we go we are in God's temple. Alas! some of us have no more sense of the sanctities around us, and no more consciousness of the Divine eye that looks down upon us, than if we were so many feathered sparrows flitting about the altar.

Let us take care, brethren, that we give our hearts to be influenced, and awed, and ennobled, and tranquillized by the sense of evermore being in the house of the Lord. Let us see to it that we keep in that house by continual aspiration, cherishing in our hearts the ways that lead to it; and so making all life worship, and every place, what the pilgrim found the stone of Bethel to be, a house of God and a gate of heaven. For everywhere, to the eye that sees the things that are, and not only the things that seem—and to the heart that feels the unseen presence of the one reality, God Himself—all places are temples, and all work may be beholding His beauty and inquiring in His sanctuary; and everywhere, though our heads rest upon a stone, and there be night and solitude around us, and doubt and darkness in front of us, and danger and terror behind us, and weakness within us, as was the case with Jacob, there will be the ladder with its foot at our side and its top in the heavens; and above the top His Face, which, when we see it look down upon us, makes all places and circumstances good and sweet.

## XXIX.

### Thou art a Samaritan.

"SAY we not well that Thou art a Samaritan?"—JOHN viii. 48.



THE multitude is fond of nicknames, and usually invents them with some accuracy of insight. But its judgment of the worth of the characteristics which it discerns is generally unreliable, for it admires what is low, and scoffs at what is pure and noble. So the censure of the crowd is apt to be praise, and its praise blame.

Jesus Christ had His full share of such missiles. None of His followers have been called by worse names than was He. But the hostile taunts flung at Him are really tributes. Collectively they form a body of evidence as to His character and work, all the more valuable because it comes from His enemies and was supposed to be fatal to His claims. His opponents' caricatures present substantially the same face as is lovingly painted by the evangelists. This name of Samaritan, for example, shows the maliciously distorted image of some facts in His teaching and conduct. The question in the text proves that the designation had been previously in common use, and its currency proves the general feeling of its appro-

priateness. If we ask how Jesus earned it, we are led straight to some of the most glorious aspects of His character and work. Let us, then, take the guidance of His enemies, and use the help of their rancorous abuse to aid us in understanding what it was in Him which struck dull brains and malicious hearts so as to give occasion for this name.

There are three points especially which seem to me to be brought out by it. The name witnesses to Christ's prophet-like boldness of rebuke of national prejudices and national sins. It witnesses to what I may call, for want of a better word, His originality. And it witnesses to His universality. These three thoughts seem to me to be the truths which underlie my text. And with them for its meaning we may answer its question with, "Yes, ye said well that He was a Samaritan."

I.—First, then, the name witnesses to Christ's prophet-like boldness in cutting against the grain of national prejudice, and in rebuking national sins.

The occurrence which gave occasion to my text may be taken as a specimen of a whole series of facts which underlie this name. Our Lord has just been rebuking the Jews for their sinfulness, denying that they are Abraham's seed, asserting that they do not belong to God, telling them to their faces that they are slaves and children of the Devil. And they, in their folly, think that nobody that was a good Jew at heart could say such bitter things about the chosen people. They hear the tongue of an enemy in such words, and so they fiercely turn upon Him, "Thou art a Samaritan!" They did not recognize the love that underlay the sternness, the throbbing of a heart

that desired their good, and therefore warned them of their evil. Nations, like individuals, too often think that the man becomes their enemy who tells them the truth. And these people, misunderstanding the impulse of the words, and feeling keenly their sharp edge, can only suppose that He is a bad Jew, and at heart an enemy to His race, who can speak thus.

The word then points to one outstanding characteristic of our Lord's teaching—viz., to the sternness with which He denied all validity to the merely natural descent on which the whole nation prided itself. Because of mere physical descent they fancied themselves to be Heaven's favourites, and high above these "dogs of the uncircumcision" round them; and here came one of themselves, saying, "You are not Abraham's children unless you do the deeds of Abraham." Again, Christ depreciated as of no value the mere externalisms of worship. He made a clean sweep of rabbinical casuistry. He turned a stream of cold water upon the excited Messianic hopes of worldly dominion which so fired their hearts with enthusiasm. He never spared the lash of condemnation for the sins that were rampant round Him, and His gentle voice rose into sternness when He spoke with tears, and yet with unfaltering confidence, of the certain fatal end of it all. And so this Man, running counter to national prejudices, keeping no terms with popular delusions, despising, and trying to make others despise, the lies which led the people away, had the charge flung at His head, "Thou art a Samaritan," which only meant that, prophet-like, "He set the trumpet to His mouth, and declared to the house of Israel its transgression, and to Jacob his sin."



My friends, the same fate attends all men who play the same part. A democracy demands flattery, and public men are more and more abasing themselves to the degradation of ministering to the supposed wishes instead of cutting dead against the grain of the *wishes*, if necessary, in order to meet the true wants of the people. Wherever some one strong man stands up to oppose the wild current of popular wishes, he may make up his mind that the charge of being "a bad citizen, unpatriotic, a lover of the enemies of the people," will be flung at him. You Christian men and women have to face the same calumnies as your Master had. The rotten eggs flung at the objects of popular execration—if I might use a somewhat violent figure—turn to roses in their flight. The praises of good men and the scoffs of loose-living and godless ones are equally valuable certificates of character. The Church which does not earn the same sort of opprobrium which attended its Master has probably failed of its duty. It is good to be called "gloomy" and "sour-visaged" by those whose only notion of pleasure is effervescent immorality; and it is good to be called intolerant by the crowd that desires to be tolerant of vice. So, my friends, I want you to understand that you, too, have to tread in the Master's steps. The "imitation of Jesus" does not consist merely in the sanctities and secrecies of communion, and the blessings of a meek and quiet heart, but includes standing where He stood, in avowed and active opposition to widespread evils, and, if need be, in the protesting opposition to popular error. And if you are called nicknames, never mind! Remember what the Master said, "They shall bring you before

kings and magistrates"—the tribunal of the many-headed is a more formidable judgment-bench than that of any king. "And it shall turn to a testimony for you."

II.—Now, secondly, this name is the witness to what I venture to call, for want of a better term, the originality of Jesus Christ.

It bears witness to the dim feeling which onlookers had that in Him was a new phenomenon, not to be accounted for by birth and descent, by training and education, or by the whole of what people nowadays call environment. He did not come out of these circumstances. This is not a regulation pattern type of Jew. He is "a Samaritan." That is to say, He is unlike the people among whom He dwells; and betrays that other influences than those which shaped them have gone to the making of Him.

That is one of the most marked, outstanding, and important features in the teaching and in the character of Jesus Christ, that it is absolutely independent of, and incapable of being accounted for by, anything that He derived from the circumstances in which He lived. He was a Jew, and yet He was not a Jew. He was not a Samaritan, and yet He was a Samaritan. He was not a Greek, and yet He was. He was not a Roman, nor an Englishman, nor a Hindoo, nor an Asiatic, nor an African; and yet He had all the characteristics of these races within Himself; and held them all in the ample sweep of His perfect Manhood.

If we turn to His teaching we find that, whilst no doubt to some extent it is influenced in its forms by the necessities of its adaptation to the first listeners,

there is a certain element in it far beyond anything that came from rabbis, or even from prophets and psalmists. Modern Christian scholarship has busied itself very much in these days with studying Jewish literature, so far as it is available, in order to ascertain how far it formed the teaching, or mind, of Jesus the Carpenter of Nazareth. There is a likeness, but the likeness only serves to make the unlikeness more conspicuous. And I, for my part, venture to assert that, whilst the form of our Lord's teaching may largely be traced to the influences under which He was brought up, and whilst the substance of some parts of it may have been anticipated by earlier rabbis of His nation, the crowd that listened to Him on the mountain top had laid their fingers upon the more important fact when they "wondered at His teaching," and found the characteristic difference between it, and that of the men to whom they had listened, in the note of authority with which He spoke. Jesus never argues, He asserts; He claims; and in lieu of all arguments He gives you His own "Verily! verily! I say unto you."

But not only in the form, but in the substance, in the lofty morality, in the spiritual religion, in the revelation of the Father and the Fatherhood for all men, Christ's teaching as teaching stands absolutely alone.

If we turn to His character, the one thing that strikes us is that about it there is nothing of the limitations of time or race which stamp all other men. He is not good after the fashion of His age, or of any other age; He is simply embodied and perfect goodness. This Tree has shot up high above the fences

that enclose the grove in which it grows, and its leaf lasts for ever.

Run over, in your mind, other great names of heroes, saints, thinkers, poets ; they all bear the stamp of their age and circumstances, and the type of goodness or the manner of thought which belonged to these. Jesus Christ alone stands before men absolutely free from any of the limitations which are essential in the case of every human excellence and teacher. And so He comes to us with a strange freshness, with a strange closeness ; and nineteen centuries have not made Him fit less accurately to our needs than He did to those of the generation amidst which he condescended to live. Thickening mists of oblivion wrap all other great names as they recede into the past ; and about the loftiest of them we have to say, "This man, having served his generation, fell on sleep, and saw corruption." But Jesus Christ lasts, because there is nothing local or temporary about His teaching or His character.

Now this peculiar originality, as I venture to call it, of Christ's character is a very strong argument for the truthful accuracy of the picture drawn of Him in these four Gospels. Where did these four men get their Christ ? Was it from imagination. Was it from myth ? Was it from the accidental confluence of a multitude of traditions ? There is an old story about a painter who, in despair of producing a certain effect of storm upon the sea, at last flung his wet sponge at the canvas, and to his astonishment found that it had done the very thing he wanted. But wet sponges cannot draw likenesses ; and to allege that these four men drew such a picture, in such compass, without any-

body sitting for it, seems to me about the most desperate hypothesis that ever was invented. If there were no Christ, or if the Christ that was, was not like what the Gospels paint Him as being, then the authors of these little booklets are consummate geniuses, and their works stand at the very top of the imaginative literature of the world. It is more difficult to account for the Gospels, if they are not histories, than it is to account for the Christ whom they tell us of if they are.

And then, further, there is only one key to the mystery of this originality. Christ is perfect man, high above limitations, and owing nothing to environment, because He is the Son of God. I would as soon believe that grass roots, which for years, in some meadow, had brought forth, season after season, nothing but humble green blades, shot up suddenly into a palm tree, as I would believe that simple natural descent brought all at once into the middle of the dull succession of common-place and sinful men this radiant and unique figure. Account for Christ, all you unbelievers! The question of to-day, round which all the battle is being fought, is the person of Jesus Christ. If He be what the Gospels tell us He is, there is nothing left for the unbeliever worth a struggle. "What think ye of Christ? Whose son is He?" The Jews said, "Thou art a Samaritan!" We say, "Thou art the Christ; the Son of the living God."

III.—Lastly, the name bears witness to Christ's universality.

I presume that, in addition to what seemed His hostility to what was taken to be true Judaism,

another set of facts underlay the name—viz., those which indicated his kindly relations with the people whom it was every good Jew's pleasant duty to hate with all his heart. The story of the Samaritan woman in John's Gospel, the parable of the Good Samaritan, the incident of the grateful leper, who was a Samaritan, the refusal to allow the eager apostles to bring down fire from heaven to consume inhospitable churls in a Samaritan village, were but outstanding specimens of what must have been a characteristic of His whole career not unknown to His enemies. So they argued, "If you love our enemies you must hate us; and you must be one of them," thereby distorting, but yet presenting, what is the great glory of Christ's Gospel, and of Christ Himself, that He belongs to the world; and that His salvation, the sweep of His love, and the power of His Cross, are meant for all mankind.

That universality largely arises from the absence of the limitations of which I have already spoken sufficiently. Because He belongs to no one period as regards His character, He is available for all periods as regards His efficacy. Because His teaching is not dyed in the hues of any school or of any age or of any cast of thought, it suits for all mankind. This water comes clear from the eternal rock, and has no taint of any soil through which it has flowed. Therefore the thirsty lips of a world may be glued to it, and drink and be satisfied. His one sacrifice avails for the whole world.

But let me remind you that universality means also individuality; and that Jesus Christ is the Christ for all men because He is each man's Christ. The tree of life stands in the middle of the garden that all may



have equal access to it. Is this universal Christ yours; thine? That is the question. Make Him so by putting out your hand and claiming your share in Him, by casting your soul upon Him, by trusting your all to Him, by listening to His Word, by obeying His commands, by drinking in the fulness of His blessing. You can do it if you will. If you do not, the universal Christ is nothing to you. Make Him yours, and be sure that the sweep of His love and the efficacy of His sacrifice embrace and include thee. He is the universal Christ; therefore He is the only Christ; "neither is there salvation in any other." Through Him all men, each man, thou, must be saved. Without Him all men, every man, thou, can not be saved. Take Him for yours, and you will find that each who possesses Him, possesses Him altogether, and none hinders the other in his full enjoyment of "the bread of God which came down from heaven."



## Rhoda.

"A damsel . . . named Rhoda."—ACTS xii. 13.

"HODA" means "a rose," and *this* rose has kept its bloom for eighteen hundred years, and is still sweet and fragrant. What a lottery undying fame is! Men will give their lives to earn it; and this servant-girl got it by one little act, and never knew that she had it, and I suppose she does not know to-day that, everywhere throughout the whole world where the Gospel is preached "shall this that she hath done be spoken of for a memorial of her." Is the love of fame worthy of being called "the last infirmity of noble minds"? Or is it the delusion of ignoble ones? Why need we care whether anybody ever hears of us after we are dead and buried, so long as God knows about us? The "damsel named Rhoda" was little the better for the immortality which she has unconsciously won.

Now there is a very singular resemblance between the details of this incident and those of another case, when Peter was recognized in the dark by his voice, and the Evangelist Luke, who is the author of the Acts of the Apostles, seems to have had the resemblance be-

tween the two scenes—that in the high priest's palace and that outside Mary's door—in his mind, because he uses in this narrative a word which occurs, in the whole of the New Testament, only here and in his account of what took place on that earlier occasion. In both incidents, a maid servant recognizes Peter by his voice, and in both she “constantly affirms” that it was so. I do not know that there is anything to be built upon the resemblance, but at all events I think that the use of the same unusual word in the two cases, and nowhere else, seems to suggest that Luke felt how strangely events sometimes double themselves; and how the man that is here all but a martyr is re-enacting, with differences, something like the former scene, when he was altogether a traitor. But, be that as it may, there are some lessons which we may gather from this vivid picture of Rhoda and her behaviour on the one side of the door, while Peter stood hammering in the morning twilight on the other.

I.—We may notice in the relations of Rhoda to the assembled believers a striking illustration of the new bond of union supplied by the Gospel.

Rhoda was a slave. The word rendered in our version “damsel” means a female slave. Her name being a Gentile name, and her servile condition, make it probable that she was not a Jewess. If one might venture to indulge in a guess, it is not at all unlikely that her mistress, Mary, John Mark's mother, Barnabas' sister, a well-to-do woman of Jerusalem, who had a house big enough to take in the members of the Church in great numbers, and to keep up a considerable establishment, had brought this slave-girl from

the island of Cyprus. At all events, she was a slave. In the time of our Lord, and long after, these relations of slavery brought an element of suspicion, fear, and jealous espionage into almost every Roman household, because every master knew that he passed his days and nights among men and women who wanted nothing better than to wreak their vengeance upon him. A man's foes were eminently those of his own household. And now here this child-slave, a Gentile, has been touched by the same mighty love as her mistress; and Mary and Rhoda were kneeling together in the prayer-meeting when Peter began to hammer at the door. Neither woman thought now of the unnatural, unwholesome relation which had formerly bound them. In God's good time, and by the slow process of leavening society with Christian ideas, that diabolical institution perished in Christian lands. Violent reformation of immoralities is always a blunder. "Raw haste" is "half-sister to Delay." Settlers in forest lands have found that it is endless work to grub up the trees, or even to fell them. "Root and branch" reform seldom answers. The true way is to girdle the tree by taking off a ring of bark round the trunk, and letting nature do the rest. Dead trees are easily dealt with; living ones blunt many axes and tire many arms, and are alive after all. Thus the Gospel waged no direct war with slavery, but laid down principles which, once they are wrought into Christian consciousness, made its continuance impossible. But, pending that consummation, the immediate action of Christianity was to ameliorate the condition of the slave. The whole aspect of the ugly thing was changed as soon as master and slave together became the slaves of the

Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospel has the same sort of work to do to-day, and there are institutions in full flourishing existence in this and every other civilized community as entirely antagonistic to the spirit and principles of Christianity as Roman slavery was. I, for my part, believe that the one uniting bond and healing medicine for society is found in Jesus Christ; and that in Him, and in the principles deducible from His revelation by word and work, applied to all social evils, is their cure, and their only cure. That slight, girlish figure standing at the door of Mary, her slave, and yet her sister in Christ, may be taken as pointing symbolically the way by which the social and civic evils of this day are to be healed, and the war of classes to cease.

II.—Note how we get here a very striking picture of the sacredness and greatness of small common duties.

Rhoda came out from the prayer-meeting to open the gate. It was her business, as we say, "to answer the door," and so she left off praying to go and do it. So doing, she was the means of delivering the Apostle from the danger which still dogged him. It was of little use to be praying on one side of the shut door when on the other he was standing in the street, and the day was beginning to dawn; Herod's men would be after him as soon as daylight disclosed his escape. The one thing needful for him was to be taken in and sheltered. So the praying group and the girl who stops praying when she hears the knock which it was her business to attend to were working in the same direction. It is not necessary to insist that no heights or delights of devotion and secret communion are suffi-

cient excuses for neglecting or delaying the doing of the smallest and most menial task which is our task. If your business is to keep the door, you will not be leaving, but abiding in the secret place of the Most High, if you get up from your knees in the middle of your prayer, and go down to open it. The smallest, commonest acts of daily life are truer worship than is rapt and solitary communion, or united prayer, if the latter can only be secured by the neglect of the former. Better to be in the lower parts of the house attending to the humble duties of the slave than to be in the upper chamber, uniting with the saints in supplication, and leaving tasks unperformed.

Let us remember how we may find here an illustration of another great truth, that the smallest things, done in the course of the quiet discharge of recognized duty, and being, therefore, truly worship of God, have in them a certain quality of immortality, and may be eternally commemorated. It was not only the lofty and unique expression of devotion which another woman gave when she broke the alabaster box to anoint the feet of the Saviour which were to be pierced with nails to-morrow that has been held worthy of undying remembrance. The name and act of a poor slave girl have been commemorated by that Spirit, who preserves nothing in vain, in order that we should learn that things which we vulgarly call great, and those which we insolently call small, are regarded by Him, not according to their apparent magnitude, but according to their motive and reference to Him. He says, "I will never forget any of their works"; and this little deed of Rhoda's, like the rose petals that careful housekeepers in the



country keep upon the sideboard in china bowls to diffuse a fragrance through the room, is given us to keep in memory for ever. a witness of the sanctity of common life when filled with acts of obedience to Him.

III.—The same figure of the damsel named Rhoda may give us a warning as to the possibility of forgetting very plain duties under the pressure of very legitimate excitement.

“She opened not the door for gladness,” but ran in and told them. Yes! And if, whilst she was running in with her message, Herod’s quaternions of soldiers had come down the street, there would have been “no small stir” in the church as to “what had become of Peter.” He would have gone back to his prison sure enough. Her *first* duty was to open the door; her *second* one was to go and tell the brethren “we have got him safe inside”; but in the rush of joyous emotion she naively forgot what her first business was, “lost her head,” as we say, and so went off to tell that he was outside, instead of letting him in. Now joy and sorrow are equally apt to make us forget plain and pressing duties, and we may learn from this little incident the old-fashioned, but always necessary advice, to keep feeling well under control, to use it as impulse, not as guide, and never to let emotion, which should be down in the engine-room, come on deck and take the helm. It is dangerous to obey feeling, unless its degrees are countersigned by calm common sense illuminated by Scripture. Sorrow is apt to obscure duty, by its darkness and joy, by its dazzle. It is hard to see the road at midnight, or at midday when the sun is in our eyes. Both need to be con-

trolled. Duty remains the same, whether my heart be beating like a sledge-hammer, or whether my "bosom's lord sits lightly on its throne." Whether I am sad or glad, the door that God has given me to watch has to be opened and shut by me. And whether I am a door-keeper in the house of the Lord, like Rhoda in Mary's, or have an office that people think larger and more important, the imperativeness of my duties is equally independent of my momentary emotions and circumstances. Remember, then, that duty remains while feeling fluctuates, and that, sorrowful or joyful, we have still the same Lord to serve and the same crown to win.

IV.—Lastly, we have here an instance of a very modest but positive and fully-warranted trust in one's own experience in spite of opposition.

I need not speak about that extraordinary discussion which the brethren got up in the upper room. They had been praying, as has often been remarked, for Peter's deliverance, and now that he is delivered they will not believe it. I am afraid there is often a dash of unbelief in immediate answers to our prayers mingling with the prayers. And although the petitions in this case were intense and fervent, as the original tells us, and had been kept up all night long, and although their earnestness and worthiness are guaranteed by the fact that they were answered, yet when the veritable Peter, in flesh and blood, stood before the door, they first said to the poor girl, "Thou art mad," and then, "It is his angel! It cannot be he." Nobody ever seems to have thought of going to the door to see whether it was he or not, but they went arguing with Rhoda as to whether she was right

or wrong. The unbelief that alloys even golden faith is taught us in this incident.

Rhoda "constantly affirmed that it was so," like the other portress that had picked out Peter's voice amongst the men huddled round the fire in the high priest's chamber.

The lesson is—trust your own experience, whatever people may have to say against it. If you have found that Jesus Christ can help you, and has loved you, and that your sins have been forgiven, because you have trusted in Him, do not let anybody laugh or talk you out of that conviction. If you cannot argue, do like Rhoda, "constantly affirm that it is so." That is the right answer, especially if you can say to the antagonistic party, "Have you been down to the door, then, to see?" And if they have to say "No!" then the right answer is, "You go and look as I did, and you will come back with the same belief that I have."

So at last they open the door and there he stands. Somebody else is standing at the door knocking. Peter's hammer, hammer, hammer at the gate is wonderfully given in the story. It goes on as a kind of running accompaniment through the talk between Rhoda and the friends. It might have put a stop to the conversation, one would have thought. But another stands at the door knocking, still more persistently, still more patiently. "Behold! I stand at the door and knock. If any man open the door I will come in."

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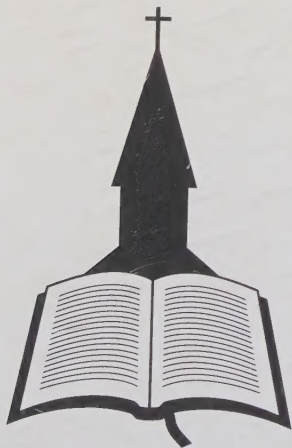
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